WAITING FOR DAYLIGHT

H·M·TOMLINSON

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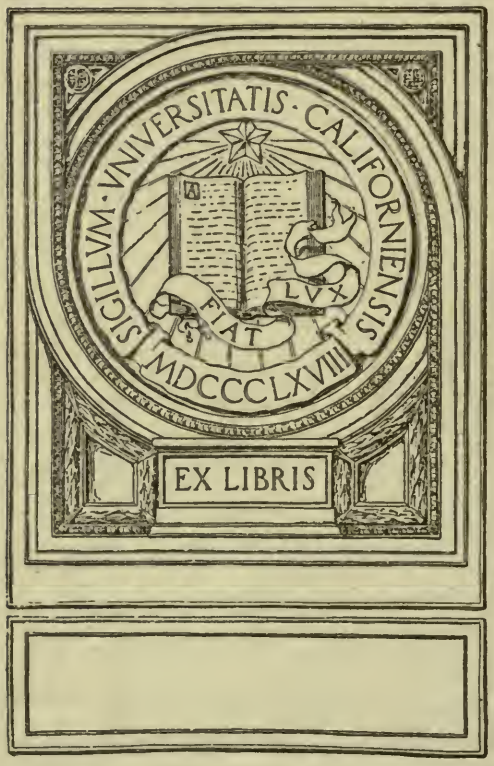

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BY

H. M. TOMLINSON
Author of "London River"

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TO
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WAITING FOR DAYLIGHT

IN YPRES

July, 1915. My mouth does not get so dry as once it did, I notice, when walking in from Suicide Corner to the Cloth Hall. There I was this summer day, in Ypres again, in a silence like a threat, amid ruins which might have been in Central Asia, and I, the last man on earth, contemplating them. There was something bumping somewhere, but it was not in Ypres, and no notice is taken in Flanders of what does not bump near you. So I sat on the disrupted pedestal of a forgotten building and smoked, and wondered why I was in the city of Ypres, and why there was a war, and why I was a fool.

It was a lovely day, and, looking up at the sky over what used to be a school dedicated to the gentle Jesus, which is just by the place where one of the seventeen-inchers has blown a forty-foot hole, I saw a little

round cloud shape in the blue, and then another, and then a cluster of them; the kind of soft little cloudlets on which Renaissance cherubs rest their chubby elbows and with fat faces inclined on their hands consider mortals from cemetery monuments. Then dull concussions arrived from heaven, and right overhead I made out two German 'planes. A shell-case banged the *pavé* and went on to make a white scar on a wall. Some invisible things were whizzing about. One's own shrapnel can be tactless.

There was a cellar near and I got into it, and while the intruders were overhead I smoked and gazed at the contents of the cellar—the wreckage of a bicycle, a child's chemise, one old boot, a jam-pot, and a dead cat. Owing to an unsatisfactory smell of many things I climbed out as soon as possible and sat on the pedestal again.

A figure in khaki came straight at me across the Square, its boots sounding like the deliberate approach of Fate in solitude. It stopped and saluted, and said: "I shouldn't stay 'ere, sir. They gen'ally begin about now. Sure to drop some 'ere."

At that moment a mournful cry went over us, followed by a crash in Sinister Street. My way home! Some masonry fell in sympathy from the Cloth Hall.

"Better come with me till it blows over, sir. I've got a dug-out near."

We turned off into a part of the city unknown to me. There were some unsettling noises, worse, no doubt, because of the echoes behind us; but it is not dignified to hurry when one looks like an officer. One ought to fill a pipe. I did so, and stopped to light it. I paused while drawing at it, checked by the splitting open of the earth in the first turning to the right and the second to the left, or thereabouts.

"That's a big 'un, sir," said my soldier, taking half a cigarette from behind his ear and a light from my match; we then resumed our little promenade. By an old motor 'bus having boards for windows, and War Office neuter for its colour, but bearing for memory's sake on its brow the legend "Liverpool Street," my soldier hurried slightly, and was then swallowed up. I was alone. While looking about for pos-

sible openings I heard his voice under the road, and then saw a dark cavity, low in a broken wall, and crawled in. Feeling my way by knocking on the dark with my forehead and my shins, I descended to a lower smell of graves which was hollowed by a lighted candle in a bottle. And there was the soldier, who provided me with an empty box, and himself with another, and we had the candle between us. On the table were some official documents under a shell-nose, and a tin of condensed milk suffering from shock. Pictures of partly clad ladies began to appear on the walls through the gloom. Now and then the cellar trembled.

"Where's that old 'bus come from?" I asked.

"Ah! The poor old bitch, sir," said the soldier sadly.

"Yes, of course, but what's the matter with her?"

"She's done in, sir. But she's done her bit, she has," said my soldier, changing the crossing of his legs. "Ah! little did she think when I used to take 'er acrorse Ludget Circus what a 'ell of a time I'd 'ave to give

'er some day. She's a good ole thing. She's done 'er bit. She won't see Liverpool Street no more. If medals wasn't so cheap she ought to 'ave one, she ought."

The cellar had a fit of the palsy, and the candle-light shuddered and flattened.

"The ruddy swine are *ruddy* wild to-day. Suthin's upset 'em. 'Ow long will this ruddy war last, sir?" asked the soldier, slightly plaintive.

"I know," I said. "It's filthy. But what about your old 'bus?"

"Ah! what about 'er. She ain't 'arf 'ad a time. She's seen enough war to make a general want to go home and shell *peas*. What she knows about it would make them clever fellers in London who reckon they know all about it turn green if they heard a door slam. Learned it all in one jolly old day, too. Learned it sudden, like you gen'ally learn things you don't forget. And I reckon I 'adn't anything to find out, either, not after Antwerp. Don't tell me, sir, war teaches you a lot. It only shows fools what they didn't know but might 'ave guessed.

" You know Poperinghe ? Well, my trip was between there an' Wipers, gen'ally. The stones on the road was enough to make 'er shed nuts and bolts by the pint. But it was a quiet journey, take it all round, and after a cup o' tea at Wipers I used to roll home to the park. It was easier than the Putney route. Wipers was full of civilians. Shops all open. Estaminets and nice young things. I used to like war better than a school-boy likes Sat'd'y afternoons. It wasn't work and it wasn't play. And there was no law you couldn't break if you 'ad sense enough to come to attention smart and answer quick. Yes, sir.

" I knew so little about war then that I'm sorry I never tried to be a military expert. But my education was neglected. I can only write picture postcards. It's a pity. Well, one day it wasn't like that. It dropped on Wipers, and it wasn't like that. It was bloody different. I wasn't frightened, but my little inside was.

" First thing was the gassed soldiers coming through. Their faces were green and blue, and their uniform a funny colour. I

didn't know what was the matter with 'em, and that put the wind up, for I didn't want to look like that. We could hear a gaudy rumpus in the Salient. The civvies were frightened, but they stuck to their homes. Nothing was happening there then, and while nothing is happening it's hard to believe it's going to. After seeing a Zouave crawl by with his tongue hanging out, and his face the colour of a mottled cucumber, I said good-bye to the little girl where I was. It was time to see about it.

" And fact is, I didn't 'ave much time to think about it, what with gettin' men out and gettin' reinforcements in. Trip after trip.

" But I shall never have a night again like that one. Believe me, it was a howler. I steered the old 'bus, but it was done right by accident. It was certainly touch and go. I shouldn't 'ave thought a country town, even in war, could look like Wipers did that night.

" It was gettin' dark on my last trip, and we barged into all the world gettin' out. And the guns and reinforcements were comin'

up behind me. There's no other road out or in, as you know. I forgot to tell you that night comin' on didn't matter much, because the place was alight. The sky was full of shrapnel, and the high-explosives were falling in the houses on fire, and spreading the red stuff like fireworks. The gun ahead of me went over a child, but only its mother and me saw that, and a house in flames ahead of the gun got a shell inside it, and fell on the crowd that was mixed up with the army traffic.

" When I got to a side turning I 'opped off to see how my little lady was getting on. A shell had got 'er estaminet. The curtains were flying in little flames through the place where the windows used to be. Inside, the counter was upside down, and she was laying with glass and bottles on the floor. I couldn't do anything for her. And further up the street my headquarters was a heap of bricks, and the houses on both sides of it on fire. No good looking there for any more orders.

" Being left to myself, I began to take notice. While you're on the job you just do

it, and don't see much of anything else except out of the corner of the eye. I've never 'eard such a row—shells bursting, houses falling, and the place was foggy with smoke, and men you couldn't see were shouting, and the women and children, wherever they were, turning you cold to hear 'em.

" It was like the end of the world. Time for me to 'op it. I backed the old 'bus and turned 'er, and started off—shells in front and behind and overhead, and, thinks I, next time you're bound to get caught in this shower. Then I found my officer. 'E was smoking a cigarette, and 'e told me my job. 'E gave me my cargo. I just 'ad to take 'em out and dump 'em.

" ' Where shall I take 'em, sir ? '

" ' Take 'em out of this,' says he. ' Take 'em anywhere, take 'em where you like, Jones, take 'em to hell, but take 'em away,' says he.

" So I loaded up. Wounded Tommies, gassed Arabs, some women and children, and a few lunatics, genuine cock-eyed loonies from the asylum. The shells chased us out.

One biffed us over on to the two rear wheels, but we dropped back on four on the top speed. Several times I bumped over soft things in the road and felt rather sick. We got out o' the town with the shrapnel a bit in front all the way. Then the old 'bus jibbed for a bit. Every time a shell burst near us the lunatics screamed and laughed and clapped their hands, and trod on the wounded, but I got 'er goin' again. I got 'er to Poperinghe. Two soldiers died on the way, and a lunatic had fallen out somewhere, and a baby was born in the 'bus; and me with no conductor and no midwife.

"I met our chaplain and says he: 'Jones, you want a drink. Come with me and have a Scotch.' That was a good drink. I 'ad the best part of 'alf a bottle without water, and it done me no 'arm. Next morning I found I'd put in the night on the parson's bed in me boots, and 'e was asleep on the floor."

A RAID NIGHT

September 17, 1915. I had crossed from France to Fleet Street, and was thankful at first to have about me the things I had proved, with their suggestion of intimacy, their look of security; but I found the once familiar editorial rooms of that daily paper a little more than estranged. I thought them worse, if anything, than Ypres. Ypres is within the region where, when soldiers enter it, they abandon hope, because they have become sane at last, and their minds have a temperature a little below normal. In Ypres, whatever may have been their heroic and exalted dreams, they awake, see the world is mad, and surrender to the doom from which they know a world bereft will give them no reprieve.

There was a way in which the office of that daily paper was familiar. I had not expected it, and it came with a shock. Not only the compulsion, but the bewildering

inconsequence of war was suggested by its activities. Reason was not there. It was ruled by a blind and fixed idea. The glaring artificial light, the headlong haste of the telegraph instruments, the wild litter on the floor, the rapt attention of the men scanning the news, their abrupt movements and speed when they had to cross the room, still with their gaze fixed, their expression that of those who dreaded something worse to happen; the suggestion of tension, as though the Last Trump were expected at any moment, filled me with vague alarm. The only place where that incipient panic is not usual is the front line, because there the enemy is within hail and is known to be another unlucky fool. But I allayed my anxiety. I leaned over one of the still figures, and scanned the fateful document which had given its reader the aspect of one who was staring at what the Moving Finger had done. Its message was no more than the excited whisper of a witness who had just left a keyhole. But I realized in that moment of surprise that this office was an essential feature of the War; without it, the War might become

Peace. It provoked the emotions which assembled civilians in ecstatic support of the sacrifices, just as the staff of a corps headquarters, at some comfortable leagues behind the trenches, maintains its fighting men in the place where gas and shells tend to engender common sense and irresolution.

I left the glare of that office, its heat and half-hysterical activity, and went into the coolness and quiet of the darkened street, and there the dread left me that it could be a duty of mine to keep hot pace with patriots in full stampede. The stars were wonderful. It is such a tranquillizing surprise to discover there are stars over London. Until this War, when the street illuminations were doused, we never knew it. It strengthens one's faith to discover the Pleiades over London ; it is not true that their delicate glimmer has been put out by the remarkable incandescent energy of our power stations. As I crossed London Bridge the City was as silent as though it had come to the end of its days, and the shapes I could just make out under the stars were no more substantial than the shadows of its past.

Even the Thames was a noiseless ghost. London at night gave me the illusion that I was really hidden from the monstrous trouble of Europe, and, at least for one sleep, had got out of the War. I felt that my suburban street, secluded in trees and unimportance, was as remote from the evil I knew of as though it were in Alaska. When I came to that street I could not see my neighbours' homes. It was with some doubt that I found my own. And there, with three hours to go to midnight, and a book, and some circumstances that certainly had not changed, I had retired thankfully into a fragment of that world I had feared we had completely lost.

"What a strange moaning the birds in the shrubbery are making!" my companion said once. I listened to it, and thought it was strange. There was a long silence, and then she looked up sharply. "What's that?" she asked. "Listen!"

I listened. My hearing is not good.

"Nothing!" I assured her.

"There it is again." She put down her

book with decision, and rose, I thought, in some alarm.

"Trains," I suggested. "The gas bubbling. The dog next door. Your imagination." Then I listened to the dogs. It was curious, but they all seemed awake and excited.

"What is the noise like?" I asked, surrendering my book on the antiquity of man.

She twisted her mouth in a comical way most seriously, and tried to mimic a deep and solemn note.

"Guns," I said to myself, and went to the front door.

Beyond the vague opposite shadows of some elms, lights twinkled in the sky, incontinent sparks, as though glow lamps on an invisible pattern of wires were being switched on and off by an idle child. That was shrapnel. I walked along the empty street a little to get a view between and beyond the villas. I turned to say something to my companion, and saw then my silent neighbours, shadowy groups about me, as though they had not approached but

had materialized where they stood. We watched those infernal sparks. A shadow lit its pipe and offered me its match. I heard the guns easily enough now, but they were miles away.

A slender finger of brilliant light moved slowly across the sky, checked, and remained pointing, firmly accusatory, at something it had found in the heavens. A Zeppelin!

There it was, at first a wraith, a suggestion on the point of vanishing, and then illuminated and embodied, a celestial maggot stuck to the round of a cloud like a caterpillar to the edge of a leaf. We gazed at it silently, I cannot say for how long. The beam of light might have pinned the bright larva to the sky for the inspection of interested Londoners. Then somebody spoke. "I think it is coming our way."

I thought so too. I went indoors, calling out to the boy as I passed his room upstairs, and went to where the girls were asleep. Three miles, three minutes! It appears to be harder to waken children when a Zeppelin is coming your way. I got the elder girl awake, lifted her, and sat her on

the bed, for she had become heavier, I noticed. Then I put her small sister over my shoulder, as limp and indifferent as a half-filled bag. By this time the elder one had snuggled into the foot of her bed, resigned to that place if the other end were disputed, and was asleep again. I think I became annoyed, and spoke sharply. We were in a hurry. The boy was waiting for us at the top of the stairs.

"What's up?" he asked with merry interest, hoisting his slacks.

"Come on down," I said.

We went into a central room, put coats round them, answering eager and innocent questions with inconsequence, had the cellar door and a light ready, and then went out to inspect affairs. There were more searchlights at work. Bright diagonals made a living network on the overhead dark. It was remarkable that those rigid beams should not rest on the roof of night, but that their ends should glide noiselessly about the invisible dome. The nearest of them was followed, when in the zenith, by a faint oval of light. Sometimes it discovered and broke

on delicate films of high fair-weather clouds. The shells were still twinkling brilliantly, and the guns were making a rhythmless baying in the distance, like a number of alert and indignant hounds. But the Zeppelin had gone. The firing diminished and stopped.

They went to bed again, and as I had become acutely depressed, and the book now had no value, I turned in myself, assuring everyone, with the usual confidence of the military expert, that the affair was over for the night. But once in bed I found I could see there only the progress humanity had made in its movement heavenwards. That is the way with us ; never to be concerned with the newest clever trick of our enterprising fellow-men till a sudden turn of affairs shows us, by the immediate threat to our own existence, that that cleverness has added to the peril of civilized society, whose house has been built on the verge of the pit. War now would be not only between soldiers. In future wars the place of honour would be occupied by the infants, in their cradles. For war is not murder. Starving children is war, and it is not murder. What treacherous

lying is all the heroic poetry of battle! Men will now creep up after dark, ambushed in safety behind the celestial curtains, and drop bombs on sleepers beneath, for the greater glory of some fine figment or other. It filled me, not with wrath at the work of Kaisers and Kings, for we know what is possible with them, but with dismay at the discovery that one's fellows are so docile and credulous that they will obey any order, however abominable. The very heavens had been fouled by this obscene and pallid worm, crawling over those eternal verities to which eyes had been lifted for light when night and trouble were over-dark. God was dethroned by science. One looked startled at humanity, seeing not the accustomed countenance, but, for a moment, glimpsing instead the baleful lidless stare of the evil of the slime, the unmentionable of a nightmare . . .

A deafening crash brought us out of bed in one movement. I must have been dozing. Someone cried, "My children!" Another rending uproar interrupted my effort to shepherd the flock to a lower floor. There was a raucous avalanche of glass. We

muddled down somehow—I forget how. I could not find the matches. Then in the dark we lost the youngest for some eternal seconds while yet another explosion shook the house. We got to the cellar stairs, and at last there they all were, their backs to the coals, sitting on lumber.

A candle was on the floor. There were more explosions, somewhat muffled. The candle-flame showed a little tremulous excitement, as if it were one of the party. It reached upwards curiously in a long intent flame, and then shrank flat with what it had learned. We were accompanied by grotesque shadows. They stood about us on the white and unfamiliar walls. We waited. Even the shadows seemed to listen with us; they hardly moved, except when the candle-flame was nervous. Then the shadows wavered slightly. We waited. I caught the boy's eye, and winked. He winked back. The youngest, still with sleepy eyes, was trembling, though not with cold, and this her sister noticed, and put her arms about her. His mother had her hand on her boy's shoulder.

There was no more noise outside. It was time, perhaps, to go up to see what had happened. I put a raincoat over my pyjamas, and went into the street. Some of my neighbours, who were special constables, hurried by. The enigmatic night, for a time, for five minutes, or five seconds (I do not know how long it was), was remarkably still and usual. It might have been pretending that we were all mistaken. It was as though we had been merely dreaming our recent excitements. Then, across a field, a villa began to blaze. Perhaps it had been stunned till then, and had suddenly jumped into a panic of flames. It was wholly involved in one roll of fire and smoke, a sudden furnace so consuming that, when it as suddenly ceased, giving one or two dying spasms, I had but an impression of flames rolling out of windows and doors to persuade me that what I had seen was real. The night engulfed what may have been an illusion, for till then I had never noticed a house at that point.

Whispers began to pass of tragedies that were incredible in their incidence and crazi-

ness. Three children were dead in the rubble of one near villa. The ambulance that was passing was taking their father to the hospital. A woman had been blown from her bed into the street. She was unhurt, but she was insane. A long row of humbler dwellings, over which the dust was still hanging in a faint mist, had been demolished, and one could only hope the stories about that place were far from true. We were turned away when we would have assisted; all the help that was wanted was there. A stranger offered me his tobacco pouch, and it was then I found my rainproof was a lady's, and therefore had no pipe in its pocket.

The sky was suspect, and we watched it, but saw only vacuity till one long beam shot into it, searching slowly and deliberately the whole mysterious ceiling, yet hesitating sometimes, and going back on its path as though intelligently suspicious of a matter which it had passed over too quickly. It peered into the immense caverns of a cloud to which it had returned, illuminating to us unsuspected and horrifying possibilities of hiding-places

above us. We expected to see the discovered enemy boldly emerge then. Nothing came out. Other beams by now had joined the pioneer, and the night became bewildering with a dazzling mesh of light. Shells joined the wandering beams, those sparks of orange and red. A world of fantastic chimney-pots and black rounds of trees leaped into being between us and the sudden expansion of a fan of yellow flame. A bomb ! We just felt, but hardly heard, the shock of it. A furious succession of such bursts of light followed, a convulsive opening and shutting of night. We saw that when midnight is cleft asunder it has a fiery inside.

The eruptions ceased. Idle and questioning, not knowing we had heard the last gun and bomb of the affair, a little stunned by the maniacal rapidity and violence of this attack, we found ourselves gazing at the familiar and shadowy peace of our suburb as we have always known it. It had returned to that aspect. But something had gone from it for ever. It was not, and never could be again, as once we had known it. The security of our own place had been

based on the goodwill or indifference of our fellow-creatures everywhere. To-night, over that obscure and unimportant street, we had seen a celestial portent illuminate briefly a little of the future of mankind.

ISLANDS

January 5, 1918. The editor of the *Hibbert Journal* betrays a secret and lawless passion for islands. They must be small sanctuaries, of course, far and isolated; for he shows quite rightly that places like the British Isles are not islands in any just and poetic sense. Our kingdom is earth, sour and worm-riddled earth, with all its aboriginal lustre trampled out. By islands he means those surprising landfalls, Kerguelen, the Antarctic Shetlands, Timor, Amboyna, the Carolines, the Marquesas, and the Galapagos. An island with a splendid name, which I am sure he would have mentioned had he thought of it, is Fernando de Noronha.

There must be a fair number of people to-day who cherish that ridiculous dream of an oceanic solitude. We remember that whenever a story-teller wishes to make enchantment seem thoroughly genuine, he begins upon an island. We might say, if in a hurry,

that Defoe began it, but in leisure recall the fearful spell of islands in the Greek legends. It is easily understood. If you have watched at sea an island shape, and pass, forlorn in the waste, apparently lifeless, and with no movement to be seen but the silent fountains of the combers, then you know where the Sirens were born, and why awful shapes grew in the minds of the simple Greeks out of the wonders in Crete devised by the wise and mysterious Minoans, who took yearly the tribute of Greek youth—youth which never returned to tell.

How easily the picture of one's first island in foreign seas comes back! I had not expected mine, and was surprised one morning, when eastward-bound in the Mediterranean, to see a pallid mass of rock two miles to port, when I had imagined I knew the charts of that sea well enough. It was a frail ghost of land on that hard blue plain, and had a light of its own; but it looked arid and forbidding, a place of seamen's bones. Turning quickly to the mate I asked for its name. "Alboran," he said, very quietly, without looking at it, as though

keeping something back. He said no more. But while that strange glimmer was on the sea I watched it; I have learned nothing since of Alboran; and so the memory of that brief sight of a strange rock is as though once I had blundered on a dreadful secret which the men who knew it preferred to keep.

But there is a West Indian Island which for me is the best in the seas, because the memory of it is but a reflection of my last glimpse of the tropics. That landfall in the Spanish Main was as soundless as a dream. It was but an apparition of land. It might have been no more than an unusually vivid recollection of a desire which had once stirred the imagination of a boy. Looking at it, I felt sceptical, quite unprepared to believe that what once was a dream could be coming true by any chance of my drift through the years. Yet there it remained, right in our course, on a floor of malachite which had stains of orange drift-weed. It could have been a mirage. It appeared diaphanous, something so frail that a wind could have stirred it. Did it belong to this earth? It

grew higher, and the waves could be seen exploding against its lower rocks. It *was* a dream come true. Yet even now, as I shall not have that landfall again, I have a doubt that waters could be of the colours which were radiant about that island, that rocks could be of rose and white, that trees could be so green and aromatic, and light—except of the Hesperides, which are lost—so like the exhilarating life and breath of the prime. A doubt indeed! For every whisper one hears to-day deepens the loom of a gigantic German attack.

January 19, 1918. What long hours at night we wait for sleep! Sleep will not come. A friend, who grows more like a sallow congestion of scorn than a comfortable companion, warned me yesterday, when I spoke of the end of the War, that it might have no end. He said that we could not escape our fate. Our star, I gathered, was to receive a celestial spring-cleaning. There would be bonfires of litter. We had become impeded with the rubbish of centuries of wise and experienced statecraft, and we had hardly more than begun to get rid of it. A renaissance with a vengeance! Youth was in revolt against the aged and the dead.

But what an idea to look at when waiting for sleep! I turned over with another sigh, and recalled that William James has advised us that a deleterious thought may be exorcized by willing another that is sunny. I tried to command a more enjoyable picture

for eyes that were closed but intent. Yet you never know where the most promising image will transport you through some inconsequential association. I recalled a pleasing day in the Eastern Mediterranean, and that brought *Eothen* into my mind, by chance. And instantly, instead of seeing Sfax in Tunis, I was looking down from a window on a black-edged day of rain, watching an unending procession of moribund figures jolting over the *pavé* of a street in Flanders, in every kind of conveyance, from the Yser. There I was, back at the War, at two in the morning, and all because I had read *Eothen* desperately in odd moments while waiting for the signs which would warn me that the enemy was about to enter that village.

No escape yet! I could hear the old clock slowly making its way towards another day. I heard a belated wayfarer going home, his feet muffled in snow. Anyhow, I never had much of an opinion of *Eothen*, a book over which the cymbals have been banged too loudly. Compare it, as a travel book, for substance and style, with *A Week*

on the Concord; though that is a silly thing to ask, if no sillier than literary criticism usually is. But though all the lists the critics make of our best travel books invariably give Kinglake's a principal place, I have not once seen Thoreau's narrative included.

What is the test for such a book? I should ask it to be a trustworthy confidence of a kingdom where the marches may be foreign to our cheap and usual experience, though familiar enough to our dreams. It may not offer, but it must promise that Golden City which drew Raleigh to the Orinoco, Thoreau to Walden Pond, Doughty to Arabia, Livingstone to Tanganyika, and Hudson to the Arctic. The fountain of life is there. We hope to come to our own.

We never notice whether that country has good corn-land, or whether it is rich enough in minerals to arouse an interest in its future. But its prospects are lovely and of good report. It is always a surprise to find the earth can look so good, and behave so handsomely, on the quiet, to a vagabond traveller

like Thoreau, who has no valid excuse for not being at honest work, as though it reserved its finest mornings to show to favoured children when really good people are not about. The Sphinx has a secret only for those who do not see her wink.

SIGNS OF SPRING

February 16, 1918. A catalogue of second-hand books was sent to me yesterday. A raid warning, news of the destruction of Parliament House, or a whisper of the authentic ascent of Mr. Lloyd George in a fiery chariot and of the flight of God, would do no more to us than another kick does to the dead. But that catalogue had to be handled to be believed. It was an incredible survival from the days before the light went out. Those minor gratifications have gone. I had even forgotten they were ever ours. Sometimes now one wakes to a morning when the window is a golden square, a fine greeting to a good earth, and the whistle of a starling in the apple tree just outside is as tenuous as a thread of silver ; the smell of coffee brings one up blithe as a boy about to begin play again. Yet something we feel to be wrong—a foggy memory of an ugly dream—ah, yes ; the War, the War. The

damned remembrance of things as they are drops its pall. The morning paper, too, I see, has the information that our men are again cheerfully waiting for the spring offensive.

Cheerfully! But, of course, the editor knows. And the *spring* offensive! I have seen that kind of vernal gladness. What an advent! When you find the first blue egg in the shrubbery behind your billet in Artois; when the G.S.O.2 comes into the mess with a violet in his fingers, and shows it to every doubter, then you know the time has come for the testing of the gas cylinders, and you wonder whether this is the last time you will be noteworthy because you had the earliest news of the chiffchaff. The spring offensive! Guns are now converging by leagues of roads to a new part of the Front, to try to do there what they failed to do elsewhere. The men, as all important editors know, are happily waiting for the great brutes to begin bellowing again in infernal concert. So there accumulates at breakfast in these spring days all that evidence which makes one proud to

share with one's fellows the divine gift of reason, instead of a blind and miserable animal instinct. No wonder the cuckoo has a merry note!

That is the way we idle and hapless civilians now begin our day. I look up to the sky, and wonder whether this inopportune spell of fine weather means that some London children will be killed in bed to night. As I pass the queues of women who have been waiting for hours for potatoes, and probably won't get any, though the earth doubtless is still abundant, if we had but the sense and opportunity to try it, I cannot help wondering whether it would not have been better for us to have refused the gift of reason from which could be devised the edifying wonders of civilization, and have remained in the treetops instead, so ignorant that we were unaware we were lucky.

Another grave statement by a great statesman, and, when we are fortunate, a field post card, are to-day our full literary deserts. Is it surprising that catalogues of old books do not come our way? We do not deserve them. Hope faintly revives,

when the postman cheers us with an overdue field post card, of a morning to dawn when the abstraction we name the "average intelligence" and the "great heart of the public" and the "herd mind," will not only regret that it made a ruinous fool of itself the night before, but solemnly resolve to end all disruptive and dirty habits. This wild hope was born in me of such a post card (all right so far !) coinciding with the arrival of the list of old books. It seemed at that moment that things could be different and better. Then, when closing the front door that morning—very gently—not slamming it on the run—I saw something else. The door noiselessly closed, an easy launch into a tranquil day, as though I had come down through the night with the natural process of the hours, and so had commenced the day at the right moment, I noticed the twig of a lilac bush had intruded into the porch. It directly indicated me with a black finger. What did it want ? I looked intently, sure that an omen was here. Aha ! So that was it ! The twig was showing me that it had a green nail.

Four young officers of the Flying Corps passed me, going ahead briskly, and I thought that an elm under which they walked had kindling in it a suggestion of coloured light. But it was too delicate to be more than a hope. It must be confessed that the men who fight in the air were more distinct than that light. Then the four officers parted, two to either side, when marching past another figure. They went beyond it swiftly, taking no notice of it, turned into the future, and vanished. I drew near the bowed and leisurely being, which had a spade over its shoulder.

It stopped to light a pipe, and I caught up to it. The edge of the spade was like silver with use, and the big hand which grasped it was brown with dry earth. The lean neck of this figure was tinctured with many summers, and cross-hatched by the weather and mature maleness. I caught a smell of newly turned earth. The figure moved as though time were nothing. It turned its face as I drew level, and said it was a good morning. The morning was better than good ; and somehow this object

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in an old hat and clothes as rough as bark, with a face which probably had the same expression when William was momentous at Hastings, and when Pitt solemnly ordered the map of Europe to be rolled up, was in accord with the light in the elm, and the superior and convincing insolence of the blackbirds. They all suggested the tantalizing idea that solid ground is near us, in this unreasonable world of anxious change, if only we had intelligence enough to know where to look for it.

PROSE WRITING

March 16, 1918. A critic has been mourning because good prose is not being written to-day. This surprised him, and he asked why it was that when poetry, which he pictured as "primroses and violets," found abundance of nourishment even in the unlikely compost these latter days provide yet prose, which he saw as "cabbages and potatoes," made but miserable growth.

It is hard to explain it, for I must own that the image of the potato confuses me. One has seen modern verse which was, florally, very spud-like. If those potatoes were meant for violets then they suggest more than anything else a simple penny guide-book for their gardeners. Here we see at least the danger of using flowers of speech, when violets and onions get muddled in the same posy, and how ill botany is likely to serve the writer who flies heedlessly to it for

literary symbols. Figures of speech are pregnant with possibilities (I myself had better be very careful here), and those likely to show most distress over their progeny are the unlucky fathers. For the first thing expected of any literary expression is that it should be faithful to what is in the mind, and if for the idea of good prose writing the image of a potato is given, then it can but represent the features of the earthy lumps which are common to the stalls of the market-place. What is prose? Sodden and lumbering stuff, I suppose. And what is poetry? That fortunate lighting of an idea which delights us with the belief that we have surprised truth, and have seen that it is beautiful.

The difficulty with what the textbooks tell us is prose is that many of us make it, not naturally and unconsciously like the gentleman who discovered he had been doing it all his life, but professionally. Consider the immense output of novels—but no, do not let us consider anything so surprising and perplexing. The novel, that most exacting problem in the sublimation of the his-

tory of our kind, not to be solved with ease, it now appears may be handled by children as a profitable pastime. Children, of course, should be taught to express themselves in writing, and simply, lucidly, and with sincerity. Yet all editors know the delusion is common with beginners in journalism that the essay, a form in which perhaps only six writers have been successful in the history of English letters, is but a prelude to serious work, a holiday before the realities have begun. They all attempt it. Every editorial letter-box is loaded with essays every morning. Yet the love of learning, and wisdom and humour, are not usual, and the gods still more rarely give with these gifts the ability to express them in the written word ; and how often may we count on learning, wisdom, and humour being not only reflected through a delightful and original character, but miraculously condensed into the controlled display of a bright and revealing beam ? It is no wonder we have but six essayists !

There is no doubt about it. If we mean by prose much more than the sincere and

lucid written expression of our desires and opinions, it is because beyond that simplicity we know the thrill which is sometimes given by a revelation of beauty and significance in common words and tidings. The best writing must come of a gift for making magic out of what are but commodities to us, and that gift is not distributed by the generous gods from barrows which go the round of the neighbourhoods where many babies are born, as are faith, hope, and credulity, those virtues that cause the enormous circulations of the picture papers, and form the ready material for the careers of statesmen and the glory of famous soldiers. It is more unusual. We see it as often as we do comets and signs in the heavens, a John in the Wilderness again, pastors who would die for their lambs, women who contemn the ritual and splendour of man-slaying, and a politician never moved by the enticements of a successful career. It is therefore likely that when we see great prose for the first time we may not know it, and may not enjoy it. It can be so disrespectful to what we think is good. It may be even

brightly innocent of it. And as in addition our smaller minds will be overborne by the startling activity and cool power of the prose of such a writer as Swift, its superiority will only enhance our complaining grief.

THE MODERN MIND

July 6, 1918. A Symphony in Verse has just come to me from America. The picture on its wrapper shows a man in green tights, and whose hair is blue, veiling his eyes before a lady in a flame-coloured robe who stares from a distance in a tessellated solitude. As London two days ago celebrated Independence Day like an American city, and displayed the Stars and Stripes so deliriously that the fact that George III was ever a British king was lost in a common acknowledgment that he was only another violent fool, this Boston book invited attention. For ladies in gowns of flame, with arms raised in appeal, may be supposed to want more than the vote ; and American poets wearing emerald tights who find themselves in abandoned temples alone with such ladies, must clearly have left Whittier with the nursery biscuits. Longfellow could never grow blue locks. Even Whitman dressed in

flannel and ate oranges in public. Nor did Poe at his best rise to assure us :

> This is the night for murder : give us knives :
> We have long sought for this.

Well, not all of us. The truth is some of us have not sought for knives with any zest, being paltry and early Victorian in our murders. Yet in this symphony in verse, *The Jig of Forslin*, by Mr. Conrad Aiken, there are such lines as these :

> When the skies are pale and stars are cold,
> Dew should rise from the grass in little bubbles,
> And tinkle in music amid green leaves.
> Something immortal lives in such air—
> We breathe, we change.
> Our bodies become as cold and bright as starlight.
> Our hearts grow young and strange.
> Let us extend ourselves as evening shadows,
> And learn the nocturnal secrets of these meadows.

It is not all knives and murder. The Jig, in fact, dances us through a world of ice lighted by star gleams and Arctic streamers, where sometimes our chill loneliness is interrupted by a woman whose " mouth is a sly carnivorous flower " ; where we escape the greenish light of a vampire's

eyes to enter a tavern where men strike each other with bottles. Mermaids are there, and Peter and Paul, and when at last Mr. Aiken feels the reader may be released, it is as though we groped in the dark, bewildered and alarmed, for assurance that this was nothing but art.

One cannot help feeling while reading this product of the modern mind that we are all a little mad, and that the cleverest of us know it, and indulge the vagaries and instability of insanity. In an advertisement to Mr. Aiken's poetry we are told that it is based on the Freudian psychology. We are not seldom reminded to-day of that base to the New Art. We are even beginning to look on each other's simplest acts with a new and grave suspicion. It causes a man to wonder what obscure motive, probably hellish, prompted his wife to brush his clothes, though when he caught her at it she was doing it in apparent kindness. Instead of the truth making us free, its dread countenance, when we glimpse it, only startles us into a pallid mimicry of its sinister aspect. It is like the sardonic grin I have seen on

the face of an intelligent soldier as he strode over filth and corpses towards shell-fire. Soldiers, when they are home again, delight in watching the faces and the ways of children. They want to play with the youngsters, eat buns in the street, and join the haymakers. They do not want the truth. Without knowing anything of Freud, they can add to their new and dreadful knowledge of this world all they want of the subconscious by reading the warlike speeches of the aged, one of the most obscene and shocking features of the War. The soldiers who are home on leave turn in revolt from that to hop-scotch. Yes, the truth about our own day will hardly bear looking at, whether it is reflected from common speech, or from the minds of artists like Mr. Conrad Aiken.

MAGAZINES

July 16, 1918. I was looking in a hurry for something to read. One magazine on the bookstall told me it was exactly what I wanted for a railway journey. It had a picture of a large gun to make its cover attractive. The next advertised its claims in another way. A girl's face was the decorative feature of its wrapper, and you could not imagine eyes and a simper more likely to make a man feel holier than Bernard of Cluny till your gaze wandered to the face of the girl smirking from the magazine beyond. Is it possible that nobody reads current English literature, as the magazines give it, except the sort of men who collect golf balls and eat green gooseberries? It seems like it. One wonders what the editors of those magazines read when they are on a railway journey. For it would be interesting to know whether this sort of thing is done purposely, like glass beads for Africa,

or whether it is the gift of heaven, natural and unconscious, like chickweed.

One would be grateful for direction in this. The matter is of some importance, because either the producers or the readers are in a bad way; and it would be disheartening to suppose it is the readers, for probably there are more readers than editors, and so less chance of a cure. I do not want to believe it is the readers. It is more comforting to suppose those poor people must put up with what they can get in a hurry ten minutes before the train starts, only to find, as they might have guessed, that vacuity is behind the smirk of a girl with a face like that. They are forced to stuff their literature behind them, so that ownership of it shall not openly shame them before their fellow-passengers.

With several exceptions, the mass of English magazines and reviews may be dismissed in a few seconds. The exceptions usually are not out yet, or one has seen them. It used not to be so, and that is what makes me think it is the producers, and not the readers, who require skilled

attention. It is startling to turn to the magazines of twenty or thirty years ago, and to compare them with what is thought good enough for us. I was looking through such a magazine recently, and found a poem by Swinburne, a prose-romance by William Morris, and much more work of a quality you would no more expect to find in a current magazine than you would palm trees in Whitechapel.

Of all the periodicals which reach the British front, the two for which there is most competition in any officers' mess are *La Vie Parisienne* and New York *Life*. The impudent periodical from Paris is universal on our front. The work of its artists decorates every dug-out. I should say almost every mess subscribes for it. It is true it is usual to account for this as being naughty chance. Youth has been separated from the sober influence of its English home, is away from the mild and tranquil light of Oxford Street feminity, is given to death, and therefore snatches in abandon at amusement which otherwise would not amuse. Do not believe it. *La Vie Parisienne*, it is true, is

certainly not a paper for the English family. I should be embarrassed if my respected aunts found it on my table, pointed to its drawings, and asked me what I saw in them. What makes it popular with young Englishmen in France is not the audacity of its abbreviated underclothing, for there are English prints which specialize in those in a more leering way, and they are not widely popular like the French print. But *La Vie* is produced by intelligent men. It is not a heavy lump of stupid or snobbish photographs. It does not leer. There is nothing clownish and furtive about it. It is the gay and frank expression of artists whose humour is too broad for the general; but, as a rule, there is no doubt about the fine quality of their drawings and the deftness of their wit. That is what makes the French print so liked by our men.

New York *Life* proves that, it seems to me. The American periodical is very popular in France, and the demand for it has now reached London. The chemise is not its oriflamme. It properly recognizes much else in life. But its usual survey of the world's

affairs has a merry expansiveness which would make the conventional editorial mind as giddy as grandma in an aeroplane. It is not written in a walled enclosure of ideas. It is not darkened and circumscribed by the dusty notions of the clubs. It does not draw poor people as sub-species of the human. It does not recognize class distinctions at all, except for comic purposes. It is brighter, better-informed, bolder, and more humane than anything on this side, and our men in France find its spirit in accord with theirs. One of the results of the War will be that they will want something like it when they come back, though I don't see how they are to get it unless it is imported, or unless they emigrate to a country where to feel that way about things is normal and not peculiar.

THE MARNE

August 3, 1918. The holy angels were at Mons; British soldiers saw them there. A Russian army was in England in 1914; everybody knew someone who had seen it. And Joan of Arc, in shining armour, has returned to the aid of the French. These and even graver symptoms warn us that we may not be in that state of equanimity which is useful when examining evidence. Only this week, in the significant absence of the house-dog, a mysterious hand thrust through my letter-box a document which proved, as only propaganda may, that this war was thoroughly explored in the Book of Daniel. Why were we not told so before? Why was Lord Haldane reading Hegel when there was Daniel? What did we pay him for? And that very same night I stood at the outer gate with one who asked me why, when there were stacks of jam in our grocer's shop, we could not buy any because the

Food Controller had omitted to put up the price. I had no time to reason this out, because at that moment we heard a loud buzzing in the sky. We gazed up into the velvet black night, that was like a skull-cap over the world. The buzzing continued. "Perhaps," said my companion, "what we can hear is our great big Bee."

That buzzing overhead did not develop. It merely waned and increased. It was remarkable but inconsequential. It alarmed while giving no good cause for alarm. In the invisible heavens there might have been One who was playing Bogie to frighten poor mortals for fun. I went in to continue my reading of Charles le Goffic's book, *General Foch at the Marne.* This was all in accord with the Book of Daniel, and the jam that was uneatable because it was not dear enough. My reading continued, as it were, the mysterious buzzing.

I can give, as a rule, but a slack attention to military history, and my interest in war itself is, fundamentally, the same as for cretinism and bad drains. I merely wonder why it is, and wish it were not. But the

Marne, I regret to say, holds me in wonder still; for this there is nothing to say excepting that, from near Meaux, I heard the guns of the Marne. I saw some of its pomp and circumstance. I had been hearing the guns of the War for some weeks then, but the guns of the Marne were different. They who listened knew that those foreboding sounds were of the crisis, with all its import. It that thundering drew nearer . . .

The Marne holds me still, as would a ghost story which, by chance, had me within its weird. I want to know all that can be told of it. And if there is one subject of the War more than another which needs a careful sorting of the mixed straws in our beards, it is the Battle of the Marne. In the case of my own beard, one of the straws is the Russian myth. In France, as in England, everybody knew someone who had seen those Russians. One huge camp, I was told, was near Chartres, and in Paris I was shown Cossack caps which had come from there. That was on the day Manoury's soldiers went east in their historic sortie of taxicabs against von Kluck. I could not

then go to Chartres to confirm that camp of Cossacks; nor—and this is my straw—could the German Intelligence Staff. I did not believe that the Russians were in France, but I could not prove they were not, nor could the German generals, who, naturally, had heard about those Russians. Now the rapid sweep of the German right wing under von Kluck had given the enemy a vulnerable flank which, in a certain situation, might admit disaster. The peril of his western flank must have made the enemy sensitive to the least draught coming from there.

It is on such frailties as this that the issue of battle depends, and the fate of empires. War as a means of deciding our luck is no more scientific than dicing for it. The first battle of the Marne holds a mystery which will intrigue historians, separate friends, cause hot debate, spawn learned treatises, help to fill the libraries, and assist in keeping not a few asylums occupied, for ages. If you would measure it as a cause for lunacy, read Belloc's convincing exposition of the battle, and compare that with le Goffic's story of the fighting

of the Ninth Army, under General Foch, by Fère Champenoise and the Marshes of St. Gond. Le Goffic was there.

Why did Fate tip the beam in the way we know? Why, for a wonder, did the sound of gunfire recede from Paris, and not approach still nearer? I myself at the time held to an unreasonable faith that the enemy would never enter Paris, in spite of what Kitchener thought and the French Government feared. Yet when challenged I could not explain why, for I was ill, and the days seemed to be biased to the German side. To have heard the guns of the Marne was as though once one had listened to the high gods contending over our destiny.

Historians of the future will spell out le Goffic on the fighting round the Tower on the Marshes at Mondement. It was the key of the swamp of St. Gond, the French centre. The Tower was held by the French when, by every military rule, they should have given it up. At length they lost it. They won it again, but because of sheer unreason, so far as the evidence shows, for at the moment they regained it Mondement had

ceased to be anything but a key to a door which had been burst wide open. Foch, by the books, was beaten. But Foch as we know was fond of quoting Joseph de Maistre : " A battle lost is a battle which one had expected to lose." In this faith, while his battalions were reduced to thin companies without officers, and the Prussian Guard and the Saxons were driving back his whole line, Foch, who had sent to borrow the 42nd Division from the general on his left, kept reporting to Headquarters : " The situation is excellent." But the 42nd had not yet arrived, and he continued to retire.

Contradicting Belloc and the usual explanations, M. le Goffic says that Foch was unaware of any gap in the German line. What he did was to thrust in a bleak venture the borrowed division against the flank of the advancing Prussians, who were in superior force. The Prussians retired. But had they not been preparing to retire ? Yet for what reason ? When all seemed lost, Foch won on the centre.

On the extreme French left, where Manoury was himself being outflanked by

von Kluck, the fatigued and outnumbered French soldiers were resigned to the worst. They had done all that was possible, and it seemed of no avail. They did not know that at that time the locomotives in the rear of the German armies were reversed; were heading to the north. What happened in the minds of the directing German generals —for that is where the defeat began—is not clear; but the sudden and prolonged resistance of the French at the Marne may have disrupted with a violent doubt minds that had been taut with over-confidence. The fear to which the doubt increased when Manoury attacked and persisted, the baffling audacity in the centre of the defeated Foch, who did everything no well-bred militarist would expect from another gentleman, and the common fervour of the French soldiers who fought for a week like men possessed, at last caused something to give way in the brain of the enemy. He could not understand it. This was not according to his plan. He could not find it in his books. He did not know what more he could do, except to retire into safety and think it over

afresh. The unexpected fury of the human spirit, outraged into desperation after it was assumed to be subdued, and bursting suddenly, and regardless of consequences, against the calm and haughty front of material science assured of its power, checked and deflected the processes of the German intelligence. I have seen an indignant rooster produce the same effect on a bull.

CARLYLE

August 17, 1918. Having something on the mind may lead one to salvation, but it seems just as likely to lead one to the asylum. The Germans, who are necessarily in the power of an argument which shows them we are devils, are yet compelled to admit that Shakespeare is worth reasoned consideration, and so they avoid the implied difficulty by explaining that, as Shakespeare was a genius, therefore he was a German. What we should do if it could be proved a grandfather of the poet was a Prussian probably only our Home Secretary could tell us, after he had made quite sure he would not be overheard by a white and tense believer in the Hidden Hand. Thank God Heine was a Jew, though even so there are rumours that a London memorial to him is to be removed. And last night I heard it expounded very seriously, by a clever man of letters, that Carlyle's day is done. Few people read Carlyle to-day—and it may be

supposed that as they read they hold his volumes with a Hidden Hand—and fewer still love him, for at heart he was a Prussian. He was, indeed, slain in our affections by Frederick the Great. His shrine at Chelsea is no longer visited. It is all for the best, because in any case he wrote only a gnarled and involved bastard stuff of partly Teutonic origin. While this appeal was being made to me, I watched the face of a cat, which got up and stretched itself during the discourse, with some hope; but that animal looked as though it were thinking of its drowned kittens. It was the last chance, and the cat did not laugh. On my way home, thinking of that grave man of letters and of his serious and attentive listeners, I noticed even the street lights were lowered or doused, and remembered that every wine-shop was shut. London is enough to break one's heart. If only by some carelessness one of the angels failed to smother his great laughter over us, and we heard it, we might, in awakening embarrassment, the first streak of dawn, put a stop to what had been until that moment an unconscious performance.

HOLIDAY READING

August 31, 1918. I make the same mistake whenever the chance of a holiday broadens and brightens. A small library, reduced by a process of natural selection, helps to make weighty the bag. But I do not at once close the bag ; a doubt keeps it open ; I take out the books again and consider them. When the problem of carrying those volumes about faces me, it is a relief to discover how many of them lose their vital importance. Yet a depraved sense of duty, perhaps the residue of what such writers as Marcus Aurelius have done for me, refuses to allow every volume to be jettisoned. It imposes, as a hair shirt, several new and serious books which there has been no time to examine. They are books that require a close focus, a long and steady concentration, a silent immobility hardly distinguishable from sleep. This year, for instance, I notice Jung's *Analytical Psychology* confidently expecting to go for

a holiday with me. I feel I ought to take some such stern reminder of mortality, and, in addition, out of a sentimental regard for the past, a few old books, for my faith is not dead that they may put a new light on the wonderful strangeness of these latter days. I take these, too.

And that is why I find them at the journey's end. But why did I bring them? For now they seem to be exactly what I would avoid—they look like toil. And work, as these years have taught the observant, is but for slaves and the conscripted. It is never admired, except with a distant and haughty sententiousness, by the best people.

Nor is it easy, by this west-country quay, to profit by a conscience which is willing to allow some shameless idleness. I began talking, before the books were even unpacked, with some old acquaintances by the waterside. Most disquieting souls! But I cannot blame them. They have been obliged to add gunnery to their knowledge of seamanship and navigation. They were silent, they shook their heads, following some thought-

less inquiries of mine after the well-being of other men I used to meet here. Worse than all, I was forced to listen to the quiet recitals of stranded cripples, once good craftsmen in the place, and these dimmed the blessed sun even where in other years it was unusually bright. That is what put holiday thoughts and literature away. I felt I had been very unfairly treated, especially as the mutilated, being young men, were unpleasantly noticeable in so small a village on fine mornings. It is not right that the calm of our well-earned leisure should be so savagely ruined. There was one morning on the quay when, watching the incoming tide, two of us were discussing Mametz Wood and some matters relating to it which will never be published, and the young man who was instructing me was approached by an older man, who beamed, and held in his hand a news-sheet. "Splendid news this morning," said the elderly man to the young soldier. He wanted the opinion of one who had fought on that ground, and I regret to say he got it. The soldier indifferently handed back the glorious news, without inspecting it,

with words which youth should never address to age.

So how can I stay by the quay all the golden day long? I have not come here prepared to endure the sudden Arctic shadows which fall, even in summer, from such clouds. The society of our fellows was never so uncertain, so likely to be stormy, as in these days. And the opinions of none of our fellow-men can be so disturbing as those of the rebel from the trenches, who appears, too, to expect us to agree with him at once, as though he had a special claim on our sympathetic attention. While considering him and his views of society, of peace and war, I see what might come upon us as the logical consequence of such a philosophy, and the dread vision does not accord with the high serenity of this Atlantic coast, where the wind, like the hilarious vivacity of a luminous globe spinning through the blue, is mocking these very sheets as I write them, and is trying to blow them, a little before their time, into vacuity.

It is not easy, and perhaps this summer it would not be right, to find the exact mood

for a holiday. In the frame of mind which is more usual with us, I put Ecclesiastes—forsaken by a previous visitor, and used to lengthen a short leg of the dressing-table—in my pocket, and leave the quay to its harsh new thoughts, and to the devices by which it gets a bare sustenance out of the tides, the seasons, and the winds, complicated now with high explosives in cunning ambush ; and go out to the headland, where wild goats among the rocks which litter the steep are the only life to blatter critical comment to high heaven. I left that holiday quay and its folk, and took with me a prayer which might go far to brace me to support the blattering of goats, if that, too, should be my luck even when in solitude. I passed at the hill-top the last whitewashed wall of the village, where the open Atlantic is sighted, and stopped to glance at the latest official poster on the wall. That explained to me, while the west wind blew, what the penalties are for young men who are in the wrong because they are young, not having attained the middle-age which brings with it immunity for the holding of

heroic notions. Yet how if those young men are not bellicose like their wise seniors ? Why should they get the evil which their elders, who will it, take so much care to avoid ?

The dust of official lorries in a hurry no longer made the wayside hedges appear aged. The wind was newly arrived from mid-ocean. I met it coming ashore. It knew nothing about us, so far. In the distance, the village with its shipping was a faint blur, already a faded impress on earth, as though more than half forgotten in spite of its important problems. It was hardly more than a discoloration, and suggested nothing of consequence. The sun on the grey rocks was giving a hint that, should ever it be required, there was heat enough left to begin things anew. I realized in alarm that such a morning of re-birth might be beautiful ; for I might not be there to sing *Laus Deo*. I might miss that fine morning. There was a suggestion of leisure in the pattern of the lichen on the granite ; it gave the idea of prolonged yet still merely tentative efforts at design. The lichen seemed to have com-

plete assurance that there was time enough for new work. The tough stems of the heather, into which I put my hand, felt like the sinews of a body that was as ancient as the other stars, but still so young that it was tranquilly fixed in the joy of its first awakening, knowing very little yet, guessing nothing of its beginning nor of its end; still infantile, with all life before it, its voice merely the tiny shrilling of a grasshopper. The rocks were poised so precariously above the quivering plain of the sea that they appeared to tremble in mid-air, being things of no weight, in the rush of the planet. The distant headlands and moors dilated under the generating sun. It was then that I pulled Ecclesiastes out of my pocket, leaned against the granite, and began:

"Vanity of vanities . . ."

I looked up again. There was a voice above me. An old goat, the venerable image of all-knowledge, of sneering and bearded sin, was contemplating me. It was a critical comment of his that I had heard. Embarrassed, I put away my book.

AN AUTUMN MORNING

September 28, 1918. The way to my suburban station and the morning train admonishes me sadly with its stream of season-ticket holders carrying dispatch-cases, and all of them anxious, their resolute pace makes it evident, for work. This morning two aeroplanes were over us in the blue, in mimic combat; they were, of course, getting into trim for the raid to-night, because the barometer is beautifully high and steady. But the people on their way to the 9.30 did not look up at the fight. Life is real, life is earnest. When I doubt that humanity knows what it is doing, I get comfort from watching our local brigadiers and Whitehall ladies on their way these tranquil autumn mornings to give our planet another good shove towards the millennium. Progress, progress! I hear their feet overtaking me, brisk and resolute, as though a revelation had come to them overnight, and so now

they knew what to do, undiverted by any doubt. There is a brief glimpse of a downcast face looking as though it had just chanted the "Dies Iræ" through the mouthfuls of a hurried breakfast; and once more this laggard is passed in the day's race towards the higher peak. The reproof goes home. It justly humiliates. But the weather is only a little west of south for one of the last fair days of the year; and the gloom of the yew in the churchyard—which stands over the obscure headstone of a man named Puplett—that yew which seems the residue of the dark past, has its antiquity full of little smouldering embers of new life again; and so a lazy man has reasons to doubt whether the millennium is worth all this hurry. As it is, we seem to have as much trouble as there is time to classify before supper; by which time, from the look of the weather, there will be more. Then why hurry over it? The tombstone says Puplett was a "thrifty and industrious parent,' and I can see what happened to him in 1727. What would I not give, I ask myself, as I pause by the yew, and listen to

the aeroplanes overhead, for a few words from this Puplett on thrift, industry, and progress! Does he now know more than brigadiers?

It may be that what Europe is suffering from in our time is the consequence of having worked too hard, since that unlucky day when Watt gave too much thought to a boiling kettle. We have worked too hard without knowing why we were doing it, or what our work would do with us. We were never wise enough to loaf properly, to stop and glance casually around for our bearings. We went blindly on. Consider the newspapers, as they are now! A casual inspection of the mixture of their hard and congested sentences is enough to show that what is wanted by our writers famous for their virility, their power of "graphic description" as their outpour is called by their disciples, and their knowledge of what everybody ought to be doing, is perhaps no more than an occasional bromide. They would feel better for a long sleep. This direction by them of our destiny is an intoxicating pursuit, but it is as exhausting as would be

any other indulgence. We might do quite well if they would only leave it to us. But they will never believe it. Ah! the Great Men of Action! What the world has suffered from their inspired efforts to shepherd humanity into worried flocks hurrying nobody knew whither, every schoolboy reads; and our strong men to-day, without whose names and portraits no periodical is considered attractive, would surely have been of greater benefit to us if they had remained absorbed in their earlier skittles. If the famous magician, who, with several others, is winning the war by suggestion, and that true soldier, General FitzChutney, and that godly and eloquent publicist, Mr. Blufflerlow, had been persuaded to stick to marbles, what misleading excitement and unprofitable anxiety would have been spared to the commonweal! Boys should be warned against and protected from Great Careers. Better still if embryologists could discover something which would enable midwives unfailingly to recognize Strong Men at birth. It would be easy then to issue to those ladies secret but specific instructions.

WAITING FOR DAYLIGHT

There is a street which turns abruptly from my straight road to the station. It goes like a sudden resolution to get out of this daily hurry and excitement. It is a pre-war street. It is an ancient thoroughfare of ours, a rambling and unfrequented by-way. It is more than four years since it was a habit of mine to loiter through it, with a man with whom I shall do no more pleasant idling. We enjoyed its old and ruinous shops and its stalls, where all things could be bought at second-hand, excepting young doves, ferrets, and dogs. I saw it again this morning, and felt, somehow, that it was the first time I had noticed it since the world suddenly changed. Where had it been in the meantime? It was empty this morning, it was still, it was luminous. It might have been waiting, a place that was, for the return of what can never return. Its sunlight was different from the glare in the hurrying road to the station. It was the apparition of a light which has gone out. I stopped, and was a little fearful. Was that street really there? I thought its illumination might be a ghostly sunlight haunting an avenue lead-

ing only to the nowhere of the memory. Did the others who were passing see that by-way? I do not think so. They never paused. They did not glance sideways in surprise, stare in an expectancy which changed almost at once into regret for what was good, but is not.

Who would not retire into the near past, and stay there, if it were possible? (What a weakness!) Retrospection was once a way of escape for those who had not the vitality to face their own fine day with its exacting demands. Yet who now can look squarely at the present, except officials, armament shareholders, and those in perambulators? This side-turning offered me a chance to dodge the calendar and enter the light of a day not ours. The morning train of the day I saw in that street went before the War. I decided to lose it, and visit the shop at the top of the street, where once you could buy anything from a toddy glass to an emu's egg having a cameo on it of a ship in full sail. It was also a second-hand bookshop. Most lovers of such books would have despised it. It was of little use

to go there for valuable editions, or even for such works as Sowerby's *Botany*. But when last the other man and myself rummaged in it we found the first volume of the *Boy's Own Paper*, and an excellent lens for our landscape camera. An alligator, sadly in need of upholstering, stood at the door, holding old umbrellas and walking-sticks in its arms. The proprietor, with a sombre nature and a black beard so like the established shadows of his lumbered premises that he could have been overlooked for part of the unsaleable stock, read Swedenborg, Plato, Plutarch, and Young's *Night Thoughts*—the latter an edition of the eighteenth century in which an Edinburgh parson had made frail marginal comments, yellow and barely discernible, such as : " How true ! " This dealer in lumber read through large goggles, and when he had decided to admit he knew you were in his shop he bent his head, and questioned you steadily but without a word over the top of his spectacles. If you showed no real interest in what you proposed to buy he would refuse to sell it.

There I found him again, still reading—Swedenborg this time—with most of the old things about him, including the Duck-billed Platypus; for nobody, apparently, had shown sufficient interest in them. The shop, therefore, was as I have always known it. There was a spark of a summer's day of 1914 still burning in the heart of a necromancer's crystal ball on the upper shelf by the window.

The curio there which was really animated put down his book after I had been in the shop for some minutes, regarded me deliberately as though looking to see what change had come to me in four such years, and then glanced up and nodded to the soothsayer's crystal. "It's a pity," he said, "that those things won't really work." He asked no questions. He did not inquire after my friend. He did not refer to those problems which the crowds in the morning trains were eagerly discussing at that moment. He sat on a heap of forgotten magazines, and remained apart with Swedenborg. I loafed in the fertile dust and quiet among old prints, geological specimens, antlers,

pewter, bed-warmers, amphoræ, and books. The proprietor presided over the dim litter of his world, bowed, pensive, and silent, suggesting in his aloofness not indifference but a retired sadness for those for whom the mysteries could be made plain, but who are wilful in their blindness, and so cannot be helped.

I came upon a copy of *Walden*, in its earliest Camelot dress (price sixpence), and remembered that one who was not there had once said he was looking for it in that edition. I turned to the last page and read: "Only that day dawns to which we are awake . . ."

I reserved the book for him at once, though knowing I could not give it to him. But what is the good of cold reason? Are we awake in such dawns as we now witness? Or has there been no dawn yet because we are only restless in our sleep? It might be either way, and in such a perplexity reason cannot help us. I thought that perhaps I might now be stirring, on the point of actually rousing. There, in any case, was the evidence of that fugitive spark of the early summer of 1914 still imprisoned in its

crystal, proof that the world had experienced a dawn or two. An entirely unreasonable serenity possessed me—perhaps because I was not fully roused—because of the indestructibility of those few voiceless hopes we cherish that seem as fugitive as the glint in the crystal ball, hopes without which our existence would have no meaning, for if we lost them we should know the universe was a witless jest, with Nobody to laugh at it.

"I want this book," I said to the shopman.

"I know," he answered, without looking up. "I've kept it for you."

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

October 12, 1918. My remembrance of the man, when I got his letter from France—and it was approved, apparently, by one of his regimental officers, for a censorial signature was upon its envelope—was a regrettable and embarrassing check to my impulse to cry Victory. I found it hard, nevertheless, in the moment when victory was near, to forgive the curious lapse that letter betrayed in a fellow who did not try for exemption but volunteered for the infantry, and afterwards declined a post which would have saved him from the trenches. He was the sort of curious soldier that we civilians will never understand. He aided the enemy he was fighting. His platoon officer reported that fact as characteristic and admirable. He had gone out under fire to hold up a wounded German and give him water. He did not die then, but soon after, on the Hindenburg Line, because, chosen as a good

man who was expert in killing others with a deadly mechanism, he was leading in an attack. This last letter of his, which arrived after the telegram warning us, in effect, that there could be no more correspondence with him, alluded in contempt to his noble profession and task, and ended with a quotation from Drum Taps which he prayed I would understand.

His prayer was in vain. I did not understand. I read that quotation at breakfast, just after finishing my fierce and terrible *Daily Dustpan*, and the quotation, therefore, was at once repugnant and unfortunate. For clearly the leader-writer of the *Dustpan* was a bolder and more martial man. It is but fair to assume, however, that as that journalist in the normal routine of a day devoted to his country had not had the good fortune to run up against the machine guns of the Hindenburg trenches, naturally he was better able to speak than a soldier who was idly swinging in the wire there. The quotation, strange for a Guardsman to make, is worth examining as an example of the baleful influence war has

upon those who must do the fighting which journalists have the hard fate merely to indicate is the duty of others. The verse actually is called Reconciliation. After a partial recovery from the shame of the revelation of my correspondent's unsoldierly spirit, a shame which was a little softened by the thought that anyhow he was dead, I went to *Leaves of Grass* for the first time for some years, to see whether Drum Taps accorded with war as we know it.

And now I am forced to confess that we may no longer accuse the Americans of coming late into the War. They appear to have been in it, if the date of Drum Taps is ignored, longer even than Fleet Street. I cannot see that we have contributed anything out of our experiences of battle which can compare with Whitman's poems. He appears to have known of war in essential episodes and incidents, as well as from a high vision of it, in a measure which the literature of our own tragedy does not compass.

A minor poet told me once that he could not read Whitman. He declared it was like chewing glass. When we criticize others,

the instant penalty is that we unwittingly confess what we are ourselves. We know the reception of *Leaves of Grass* was of the kind which not seldom greets the appearance of an exceptional book, though Emerson recognized its worth. So when occasionally we admit, shyly and apologetically, as is our habit (in the way we confess that once we enjoyed sugar candy), that long ago we used to read Emerson, it would do our superior culture no harm to remember that Emerson was at least the first of the world of letters to tell the new poet that his Leaves was "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom America has yet produced." Nothing in all his writing proves the quality of Emerson's mind so well as his instant and full knowledge of Whitman, when others felt that what Whitman was really inviting was laughter and abuse. I suppose what the young poet meant when he said reading Whitman was like a mouthful of glass was that Whitman has no music, and so cannot be read aloud. There is always a fair quantity of any poet's work which would do much to make this world a cold

and unfriendly place if we persevered in reading it aloud. In some circumstances even Shakespeare might cause blasphemy. Perhaps he has. And Whitman, like summertime, and all of us, is not always at his best. But I think it is possible that many people to-day will know the music and the solace of the great dirge beginning "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd." And again, if capturing with words those surmises which intermittently and faintly show in the darkness of our speculations and are at once gone, if the making of a fixed star of such wayward glints is the mark of a poet, then Whitman gave us "On the beach at night."

I had never thought Whitman so good till that soldier's letter accidentally discovered it to me. If Whitman had been through the campaign across the narrow straits, if Ypres, Vimy, and Cambrai had been in his own experience, he could have added little to Drum Taps. For there is nothing that is new in war. It is only the campaign that is new, and the men who are young. Yet all has happened before. But each young soldier in a new campaign feels

that his experience is strangely personal. He will have the truth revealed to him, and will think that it is an intimacy for his soul alone; yet others, too, have seen it, but are dead. The survivors of this War will imagine their experiences unique, admonitory, terrible, and that if they had the words to tell us their knowledge they would not be believed or understood. That is why the succeeding generation, too, gets caught. Yet there is enough of this War in Drum Taps to have stopped it more than two years ago if only one European in ten had had so much imagination and enterprise as would take a man through a strange field gate when he was convinced it was in that direction he should go, and enough of charity in his heart to stay him from throwing stones at the sheep while on his way.

AUTHORS AND SOLDIERS

October 26, 1918. If a man who knew no books, but who became serious when told of his emptiness, and showed eagerness to begin to fill it, were confronted with the awful strata in the library of the British Museum, and were told that that was his task, he might fall unconscious. But what cruelty! He could be warned that the threat has little in it; that the massed legions of books could do him no harm, if he did not disturb them. It could be whispered to the illiterate man—whose wisdom, it might chance, was better than much scholarship—that it is possible to read the best of the world's drama in a few months, and that in the remainder of the year he could read its finest poetry, history, and philosophy. I am but paraphrasing what was said recently by an Oxford professor. I would not dare to give

it as my own opinion, within hearing of the high priests.

Yet the professor's declaration may be not only outrageous, but right. It is a terrible thought, except to those who are merely bibliophiles just as some little boys are lovers of old postage-stamps. I think he may be right, for I have a catalogue of all the books and documents prompted by the War and published before June, 1916. It runs to 180 pages of small type. It contains the names of about 3,500 books and pamphlets. Now, let us suppose a student wished to know the truth about the War, for perhaps a very youthful student could imagine it was possible to get the truth about it. The truth may be somewhere in that catalogue; but I know, for I have tried, that it has no significant name to betray its pure gold, no strange brilliance to make the type dance on that page as one turns the leaves with a hopeless eye. There are, however, two certainties about the catalogue. One is that it would require a long life, a buoyant disposition, and a freedom from domestic cares, to read every book

in it. And the other is that there are no more books in it—which we ought to count as books—than one evening would see us through, interruptions and all. The books in that mass are as dead as the leaves of their June of the War.

I must confess, though, that I am a bibliophile with War books. Any book about the Great War is good enough for me. I am to that class of literature what little boys are to stamps. Yes; I know well the dread implication. I am aware of the worm in the mind; that I probe a wound; that I surrender to an impulse to peer into the darkness of the pit; that I encourage a thought which steals in with the quiet of midnight, and that it keeps me awake while the household sleeps. I know I consort with ghosts in a region of evil. I get the horrors, and I do not repel them. For some reason I like those ghosts. Most of them have no names for me, but I count them as old friends of mine; and where should I meet them again, at night, but amid the scenes we knew?

And what do I look for in these War

books? It is not easy to say. It is a private matter. Songs the soldiers used to sing on French roads are often in my head. I am like the man who was once bewitched, and saw and heard things in another place which nobody will believe, and who goes aside, therefore, unsociable and morose, to brood on what is not of this world. I am confessing this but to those who themselves have been lost in the dark, and are now awake again. The others will not know. They will only answer something about "Cheering up," or—and this is the strangest thing to hear—"to forget it." I don't want to forget it. So if in a book I see names like Château Thierry, Crépy-en-Valois, Dickebusch, Hooge, Vermelles, Hulluch, Festubert, Notre Dame de Lorette, Ligny-Tilloy, Sailly-Saillisel, Croiselles, Thiepval, Contalmaison, Dompierre, then I am caught. I do not try to escape.

Yet these books rarely satisfy me. Is it not remarkable that soldiers who could face the shells with an excellent imitation of indifference should falter in their books, intimidated by the opinions of those who

stayed at home? They rarely summon the courage to attack those heroic dummies which are not soldiers but idols set up in a glorious battlefield that never existed except as a romance among the unimaginative; the fine figures and the splendid war that were air-built of a rapture. These authors who were soldiers faced the real War, but they dare not deride the noble and popular figments which lived but in the transports of the exalted. They write in whispers, as it were, embarrassed by a knowledge which they would communicate, but fear they may not. To shatter a cherished illusion, to expose the truth to a proud memory, that, I will confess, is always a task before which a sensitive man will hesitate. Yet it is also part of the test of a writer's courage; by his hesitation a soldier-author may know that he is in danger of failing in his duty. Yet the opinion of the public, which intimidates us, is no mere bugbear. It is very serious. People do not enjoy the destruction of their cherished illusions. They do not crown the defamers of their idols. What is it that

balks a soldier's judgment when he begins to write about the War? He is astonished by the reflection that if he were to reproduce with enjoyment the talk of the heroes which was usual in France, then many excellent ladies might denounce it indignantly as unmanly. Unmanly! But he is right. They not only might, but they would. How often have I listened to the cool and haughty contralto of ladies of education and refinement who were clearly unaware that what they were encouraging, what to them afforded so much pride, what deepened their conviction of righteous sacrifice, was but an obscene outrage on the souls and bodies of young men. How is one to convey that to ladies? All that a timid writer may do is to regret the awful need to challenge the pious assurance of Christians which is sure to be turned to anger by the realities.

I have read in very few books anything that was as good as the gossip one could hear by chance in France. The intimate yarn of the observant soldier home on leave, who could trust his listener, is superior to much one sees in print. In that way I

heard the best story of the War. If it could be put down as it was given to me it would be a masterpiece. But it cannot be reproduced. It came as I heard it because, remembering his incredible experience, the narrator found himself in secure and familiar circumstances again, was confident of his audience, and was thinking only of his story. His mind was released, he was comfortable, and he was looking backward in a grim humour which did not quite disguise his sadness. His smile was comical, but it could move no answering smile. These intelligent soldiers, who tell us the stories we never see in print, are not thinking about their style, or of the way the other men have told such tales, but only of what happened to themselves. They are as artless as the child who at breakfast so tells its dream of the night before that one wants to listen, and Tolstoy says that is art. The child has heard nothing of the apocalyptic visions, and does not know Poe, Ambrose Bierce, or Kipling. He is concerned only with his own sensations, and you listen to him because you have

had such dreams, and he recalls a dark adventure you had forgotten.

But the difficulty in the writing of such stories is that the narrator, as soon as he begins, becomes conscious of the successful methods of other men. I have been reading a number of War stories published recently, and it was painful to see how many were ruined by Kipling before this War began. Kipling was original, and his tricks of manner, often irritating, and his deplorable views of human society, were usually carried off by his genius for observation, and the spontaneity of the drama of his stories. But when his story was thin, and he was wandering in an excursion with his childish philosophy, he was usually facetious. As an obvious and easily imitable trick for dull evenings, this elaborate jocularity seems to have been more enjoyed by his disciples than his genius for narrative when he was happy, and his material was full and sound. Yet his false and vulgar fun has spoiled many of these volumes pollinated from India. They have another defect, too, though it would be unfair to blame Kipling

for that when it may be seen blossoming with the unassuming modesty of a tulip in any number of *Punch*. I mean that amusing gravity of the snob who is sure of the exclusive superiority of his caste mark, with not the trace of a smile on his face, and at a time when all Europe is awakening to the fact that it sentenced itself to ruin when it gave great privileges to his kind of folk in return for the guidance of what it thought was a finer culture, but was no more than a different accent. It was, we are now aware, the mere Nobodies who won the War for us; and yet we still meekly accept as the artistic representation of the British soldier or sailor an embarrassing guy that would disgrace pantomime. And how the men who won must enjoy it!

WAITING FOR DAYLIGHT

November 9, 1918. I read again my friend's last field service post card, brief and enigmatic, and now six weeks old. I could find in it no more than when it first came. Midnight struck, and I went to the outer gate. The midnight had nothing to tell me. Not that it was silent ; we would not call it mere silence, that brooding and impenetrable darkness charged with doom unrevealed, which is now our silent night, unrelenting to lonely watchers.

Near my gate is a laburnum tree. Once upon a time, on nights of rain such as this, the shower caught in it would turn to stars, and somehow from the brightness of that transient constellation I could get my bearings. I knew where I was. One noticed those small matters in the past, and was innocently thankful for them. Those lights sufficed us. There was something companionable even in the street lamp. But

what is it now? You see it, when you are accustomed to the midnight gloom of war, shrouded, a funereal smear of purple in a black world. No bearing can be got from it now. What one looks into is the lightless unknown. I peer into the night and rain for some familiar and reasonable shape to loom—I am permitted to do this, for so far the police do not object to a citizen cherishing a hopeful though fatuous disposition—but my usual reward is but the sound of unseen drainage, as though I were listening to my old landmarks in dissolution. I feel I should not be surprised, when daylight came, to find that the appearance of my neighbourhood had become like Spitzbergen's.

That is why I soon retreat now from my gate, no wiser, bringing in with me on these nights of rain little more than the certainty that we need expect no maroons or bombs; and then, because the act is most unpatriotic in a time of shortage, put on more coal with my fingers, as this makes less noise than a shovel. I choose a pipe, the one I bought in a hurry at Amiens.

I choose it for that reason, and because it holds more tobacco than the others; watch the flames, and take stock.

In the winter, as we know, it never rains. It is merely wet weather. Still, that means only a retirement into winter quarters, into those long evenings against which we have hoarded our books, light and warmth in store. Perhaps in the case of the more idle there may be the consideration, pleasant and prolonged, of that other book, known to no other man, not yet written, and perhaps destined to perish, a secret dream. But what are now these books? What now is even that book which is perfect and unwritten? It, too, has lost its light. I am left staring into the fire. The newspapers tell us of a common joy at the coming of Peace. Peace? If she is coming, then we are much obliged to her. I remember during an earlier and wasted joy at a word in France of the coming of Peace agreeing with several young soldiers that Brussels would be the place to meet, to hail there with flagons the arrival of the Dove. But I do not want to be reminded

of what has happened since that day. That festival could now have but one celebrant. Then, in another year of the War, in a mood of contrition and dismay, some people began to feel that on the day Peace arrived it would be seemly if she found them on their knees in church. Since that day, too, much has happened; and when Peace does come I suppose most of us will make reasonably certain the bird resembles a dove, and go to bed early—taking another look at the long-lost creature next morning, in the presence of a competent witness, to confirm that we have not been deceived again by another turkey buzzard; and, if that is certain, then let the matter drop.

For in these years, when heavy weather obscures the fixed lights, and we are not certain about our bearings, it is useless to pretend that the darkness which once made us content with a book is now a worse kind of darkness only because intensified by a private shadow. The shadow of a personal grief does not wholly explain its sinister intensity. The night itself is different. It hides a world unknown. If a sun is to rise

on that world, then not even a false dawn yet shows. When we stand peering into our night, where the sound of rain and wind is like nothing the memory knows, and may be even the dark tumult portending a day of wrath, we may turn again in solitude to what is left to us, to our books; but not with quiet content. To-morrow we may pull ourselves together. Curiosity about our new world may awaken. We may become adventurous, and make an effort towards greeting the unknown with a cheer, to show it there is no settled ill-feeling. But it has been my experience that when leaving port in dark weather, though the voyage to come was to be novel and interesting, one heard very little cheering from the glum figures working about the deck. The ship is seaworthy, but she is bleak and foreign. In a week all will be well. We shall have cleared these icy latitudes. The sky will be fairer. We shall have more sun. We shall have become accustomed to our shipmates' unfamiliar faces and ways. It is only the start that is sullen and unpropitious.

And here is Peace coming, and a new

world, and there are my books ; yet though this pipe after midnight is nearly done, and the fire too, I have not been able to settle on a book. The books are like the ashes on the hearth. And listen to the wind, with its unpromising sounds from the wide and empty desert places ! What does any of these old books know about me, in the midst of those portents of a new age ? We are all outward bound, and this is the first night of a long voyage, its port unknown.

Even my bookshelves seem strange to-night. They look remarkably like a library I saw once in a house in Richbourg S. Vaast, which, you may remember, was a village near Neuve Chapelle. Those French volumes also survived from circumstances that had passed. They were litter. They had been left behind. I doubted whether, if I tried, I could touch them. They were not within my time. That was on a day more than three years ago—it was July, 1915 —and Richbourg then had just left this world. There was a road without a sign of life ; not a movement, except in one house. The front of that house had gone, exposing

the hollow inside, the collapsed floors and hanging beams, and showing also a doll with a foolish smirk caught in a wire and dangling from a rafter. The doll danced in hysteric merriment whenever hidden guns were fired. That was the only movement in Richbourg S. Vaast, and the guns made the only sound. I was a survivor from the past, venturing at peril among the wreckage and hardly remembered relics of what used to be familiar. Richbourg was possessed by the power which had overwhelmed it, and which was re-forming it in a changing world. To what was the world changing? There was no clue, except the oppression of my mind, the shock of the guns, and the ecstatic mockery of mirth over ruin by that little idiot doll.

Beyond the sloughing and leprous tower of Richbourg Church, where the ancient dead in the graveyard had been brought to light again, there was a house which seemed in being. I entered it, for I was told by a soldier companion that from a displaced tile in its roof I might see La Bassée. I looked through that gap, and saw La Bassée. It

was very near. It was a terra-cotta smudge. It might have been a brickfield. But it was the Enemy.

What I chiefly remember to-day is only the floor of that upper room from which, through a gap in its wall, I saw the ambush of the enemy. On the floor were scattered, mixed with lumps of plaster, a child's alphabetical blocks. A shoe of the child was among them. There was a window where we dared not show ourselves, though the day was fair without, and by it was an old bureau, open, with its pad of blotting-paper, and some letters, all smothered with fragments of glass and new dust. A few drawers of the desk were open, and the contents had been spilled. Round the walls of the room were bookcases with leaded diamond panes. Whoever was last in the room had left sections of the bookcases open, and there were gaps in the rows of books. Volumes had been taken out, had been dropped on the floor, put on the mantelpiece, or, as I had noticed when coming up to the room, left on the stairs. One volume, still open face upwards, was on the bureau.

I barely glanced at those books. What could they tell me? What did they know about it? Just as they were, open on the floor, tumbled on the stairs, they were telling me all they could. Was there more to be said? Sitting on a bracket in the shadow of a corner, a little bust of Rousseau overlooked the scene with me. In such a place, at such a time, you must make your own interpretation of the change, receiving out of the silence, which is not altered in nature by occasional abominable noises, just whatever you wish to take. There the books are, and the dust on them is of an era which abruptly fell; is still falling.

THE NOBODIES

November 11, 1918. The newspapers tell us that to-day the signal to "cease fire" will be given. This news is called "Official," to give us assurance in the fog of myth. Maroons will explode above the City. Then we shall know it is the end of the War. We ought to believe it, because They tell us this; They who do everything for us—who order us what to think and how to act, arrange for our potatoes, settle the coming up and the going down of the sun, and who for years have been taking away our friends to make heroes of them, and worse. They have kept the War going, but now They are going to stop it. We shall know it is stopped when the rockets burst.

Yet "The War" has become a lethargic state of mind for us. We accepted it from the beginning with green-fly, influenza, margarine, calling-up notices, and death. It is as much outside our control as the precession

of the equinoxes. We believed confidently in the tumultuous first weeks of the affair that mankind could not stand that strain for more than a few months; but we have learned it is possible to habituate humanity to the long elaboration of any folly, and for men to endure uncomplainingly racking by any cruelty that is devised by society, and for women to support any grief, however senselessly caused. Folly and cruelty become accepted as normal conditions of human existence. They continue superior to criticism, which is frequent enough though seldom overheard. The bitter mockery of the satirists, and even the groans of the victims, are unnoticed by genuine patriots. There seems no reason why those signal rockets should ever burst, no reason why the mornings which waken us to face an old dread, and the nights which contract about us like the strangle of despair, should ever end. We remember the friends we have lost, and cannot see why we should not share with them, in our turn, the punishment imposed by solemn and approved dementia. Why should not the War go on till the earth

in final victory turns to the moon the pock-scarred and pallid mask which the moon turns to us ?

I was looking, later this morning, at Charing Cross Bridge. It was, as usual, going south to the War. More than four years ago I crossed it on a memorable journey to France. It seemed no different to-day. It was still a Via Dolorosa projecting straight and black over a chasm. While I gazed at it, my mind in the past, a rocket exploded above it. Yes, I saw a burst of black smoke. The guns had ceased ?

A tug passing under the bridge began a continuous hooting. Locomotives began to answer the tug deliriously. I could hear a low muttering, the beginning of a tempest, the distant but increasing shouting of a great storm. Two men met in the thoroughfare below my outlook, waved their hats, and each cheered into the face of the other.

Out in the street a stream of men and women poured from every door, and went to swell the main cataract which had risen suddenly in full flood in the Strand. The

donkey-barrow of a costermonger passed me, loaded with a bluejacket, a flower-girl, several soldiers, and a Staff captain whose spurred boots wagged joyously over the stern of the barrow. A motor cab followed, two Australian troopers on the roof of that, with a hospital nurse, her cap awry, sitting across the knees of one of them. A girl on the kerb, continuously springing a rattle in a sort of trance, shrieked with laughter at the nurse. Lines of people with linked arms chanted and surged along, bare-headed, or with hats turned into jokes. A private car, a beautiful little saloon in which a lady was solitary, stopped near me, and the lady beckoned with a smile to a Canadian soldier who was close. He first stared in surprise at this fashionable stranger, and then got in beside her with obviously genuine alacrity. The hubbub swelled and rolled in increasing delirium. Out of the upper windows of the Hotel Cecil, a headquarters of the Air Force, a confetti of official forms fell in spasmodic clouds. I returned soon to the empty room of an office where I was likely to be alone; because, now the War was over, while listen-

ing to the jollity of Peace which had just arrived, I could not get my thoughts home from France, and what they were I cannot tell.

But there were some other memories, more easily borne. There was that night, for instance, late in the August of 1914, when three of us were getting away from Creil. It was time to go. We were not soldiers. Lying on the floor of a railway carriage I tried to sleep, pillowed involuntarily on someone's boot. I never knew to whom that foot belonged, for the compartment was chaos, like the world. The carriage light was feeble, and the faces I saw above me drooped under the glim, wilted and dingy. The eyes of the dishevelled were shut, and this traveller, counting the pulse of the wheels beneath, presently forgot everything . . . there was a crash, and my heart bounded me to my feet. There had been a fortnight of excitements of this kind. A bag fell and struck me back to the floor. Unseen people trampled over me, shouting. Somebody cried: "Here they are!" A cascade of passengers and

luggage tumbled over to a station platform.

It was a chilly morning. And where were we? A clock in a tower said it was five. People hurried without apparent reason in all directions. So the world may appear to us if some day we find, to our surprise, that we have returned from the dead. I leaned against a lamp-post, my mind gravel-rashed, and waited for something that could be understood. The Germans would do. We heard the enemy was close, and that the railway officials would get us away if they could. The morning became no warmer, there was no coffee, and our tobacco pouches were empty. But at least we were favoured with the chance of watching the French railwaymen at work. This was a junction, and the men moved about as though they were only busy on holiday traffic. They were easy and deliberate. I could see they would hold that line to the last pull of cotton-waste, and would run their trains while there was a mile of track. So we learned gradually that confident invaders are baffled by railwaymen and other common people, such as old

women insistent on their cows, almost as much as they are by bayonets. A country's readiness for war may be slight, yet the settled habits of the peaceful Nobodies, which are not reckoned by Imperialists when they are calculating the length of the road to conquest, are strangely tough and obstinate. You could go to a girl at the pigeon-hole of a booking-office in France, demand a ticket for a place which by all the signs might then have fallen behind the van of the German Army, and she would hand the ticket to you as though she had never heard of the War. Then the engine-driver would go on towards the sound of the guns till you wondered, made uneasy by the signs without, whether he was phrenetic and intended to run the enemy down. The train would stop, and while the passengers were listening to the shells the guard would come along and give some advice as to the best thing to do.

A little ahead of the Germans, a train came into that junction and took us away. I fell asleep again, and presently awoke to see a sombre orchard outside my window of our

stationary train. It was a group of trees entranced, like a scene before the stage is occupied. The grass in the twilight beneath the trees was rank. My sight fell drowsily to an abandoned *képi*, and, while wondering what had become of the man who used to wear it, I saw a bright eye slyly shut at me. A wink in the grass! A bearded face was laughing up at me from under the *képi*. A rifle with a fixed bayonet slid forward. Then I saw the orchard had a secret crop of eyes, which smiled at us from the ground. We moved on, and farewell kisses were blown to us.

Among the laurels of a garden beyond field batteries were in position. We crossed a bridge over a lower road and a stream. Infantry were waiting below for something, and from their attitudes seemed to expect it soon. My fellow-passengers were now awake to these omens. Broad streams of cattle undulated past our train going south, but west. "My poor Paris!" exclaimed a French lady. It was not for themselves these people were sorry. The common sort of people in the train were sorry for Paris,

for all their unlucky fellows. The train moved with hesitancy for hours. During one long pause we listened to a cannonade. One burst of sound seemed very close. A young English girl, sitting in a corner with her infant, abruptly handed the child to her husband. She rummaged in a travelling case with the haste of incipient panic. She produced a spirit-lamp, a bowl, and a tin. She had suddenly remembered it was past her baby's feeding-time.

Who won the War for us? It was such folk. They turned in docility, with no more than a pause, a pause of ignorance and wonder, of dismay they could hardly conceal, from the accustomed order of their days to form vast armies, to populate innumerable factories for the making of munitions of war, and, while their households came everywhere to ruin, they held stubbornly to the task fate had thrust upon them; yet their august governors and popular guides, frantic and afraid through the dire retribution which had fallen on that monstrous European society which so many of us had thought eternal, abjured and abused the common

sort whose efforts were all that could save us. What did they call the Nobodies? Slackers, cowards, rabbits, and field vermin; mean creatures unable to leave their football and their drink. I recall one sombre winter's day of the first November of the War, when a column of wounded Belgian soldiers shambled by me, coming out of the Yser line, on the way to succour which I knew they would not find. The doctors and the hospitals were few. These fellows were in rags which were plastered to their limbs with mud. Their eyes had the vacant look of men who had returned from the grave and who had forgotten this world. The bare feet of some of them left bloody trails on the road. Others clutched their bodies, and the blood drained between their fingers. One dropped dead at my feet. I came home with that in my mind; and the next sunrise, hearing unusual sounds outside, I lifted the blind to a dawn which was cold and ominously scarlet behind skeleton trees. I saw beneath the trees a company of my young neighbours, already in khaki, getting used to the harshness of sergeants, and to the

routine of those implacable circumstances which would take them to Neuve Chapelle, to Gallipoli, to Loos, to the Somme ; names that had no meaning for us then.

That serious company of young Englishmen making soldiers of themselves in a day with so unpropitious an opening light did not look like national indifference. Those innocents getting used to rifles were as affecting as that single line of bodies I saw across a mile of stubble near Compiègne, where a rearguard of the " Contemptibles " had sacrificed themselves to their comrades. But one could not be sure. I went to find one who could tell me whether England was awake to what confronted it. I remembered he was a quiet observer, that he knew what allowance to make for those patriotic newspapers which so early were holding up in ruinous caricature their country and their countrymen for the world to see and to scorn. He was a scholar, he was a Socialist and a pacifist, he had a sense of humour to keep him balanced. But he had gone. He had enlisted ; and he is dead.

It was a common experience. From the day the Germans entered Belgium a dumb resolution settled on our Nobodies. They did not demonstrate. They made long silent queues at the recruiting offices. It is true those offices were not ready for them and turned them away; and when by sheer obstinacy they got into the Army they were put into concentration camps that were as deadly as battle. That did not daunt them, nor turn them from their purpose, whatever that was, for they never said; and the newspapers, by tradition, had no time to find out, being devoted to the words and activities of the Highly Important. We therefore knew nothing of the munition factories that were springing up magically, as in a night, like toadstools, all over the country, and were barely aware that for some mysterious reason the hosts of the enemy were stopped dead on the road to Calais. Whose work was all this? But how should we know. Who can chronicle what Nobody does?

Sometimes there was a hint. Once again, when I returned from France in 1916, unhappy with a guess at what the future would

be like, I learned that our workers were not working. They were drinking. They had been passionately denounced by the Great and Popular, and our Press was forced to admit this disastrous crime to the world, for fidelity to the truth is a national quality. I went to an engineer who would know the worst, and would not be afraid to tell me what it was. I found him asleep in his overalls, where he had dropped after thirty-six hours of continuous duty. Afterwards, when his blasphemous indignation over profiteers, politicians, and newspapers had worn itself out, he told me. His men, using dimmed lights while working on the decks of urgent ships, often forced to work in cramped positions and in all weathers, and while the ship was under way to a loading berth, with no refreshment provided aboard, and dropped at any hour long distances from home, were still regarded by employers in the old way, not as defenders of their country's life, but as a means to quick profits, against whom the usual debasing tricks of economy could be devised. A battleship in the north had been completed five months

under contract time. Working girls, determined to make a record output of ammunition, persisted twenty-two hours at a stretch, topped their machines with Union Jacks, and fainted next morning while waiting for the factory gates to open. The spirit of the English! What virtue there is in bread and tea! Yet we might have guessed it. And again we might have remembered, as a corrective, how many grave speeches, which have surprised, shocked, and directed the nation, have been made by Great Men too soon after a noble dinner, words winged by the Press without an accompanying and explanatory wine list.

But the Nobodies are light-minded, casual, and good-hearted. Their great labour over, and their sacrifices buried, they have come out this day to celebrate the occasion with hilarious and ironic gaiety. They have won the Greatest of Wars, so they ride in motor-lorries and make delirious noises with comic instruments. Their heroic thoughts are blattering through penny trumpets. They have accomplished what had been declared impossible, and now they rejoice with an

inconsequential clatter on tea-trays and tin cans.

Yet some of us who watched their behaviour saw the fantastic brightness in the streets on Armistice Day only as a momentary veiling of the spectres of a shadow land which now will never pass. Who that heard "Tipperary" sung by careless men marching in France in a summer which seems a century gone will hear that foolish tune again without a sudden fear that he will be unable to control his emotion? And those Nobodies of Mons, the Marne, and the Aisne, what were they? The "hungry squad," the men shut outside the factory gates, the useless surplus of the labour market so necessary for a great nation's commercial prosperity. Their need kept the wages of their neighbours at an economic level. The men of Mons were of that other old rearguard, the hope of the captains of industry when there are revolts against the common lot of our industrial cities where the death-rates of young Nobodies, casualty lists of those who fall to keep us prosperous, are as ruinous as open war; a mutilation of life, a drainage

of the nation's body that is easily borne by Christian folk who are moved to grief and action at the thought of Polynesians without Bibles.

Yet the Nobodies stood to it at Mons. They bore us no resentment. We will say they fought for an England that is not us, an England that is nobler than common report and common speech. Think of the contempt and anger of the better end of London just before the War, when, at the other end, the people of Dockland revolted and defied their masters! I knew one mother in that obscure host of ignorant humanity in revolt. Two of her infants were slowly fading, and she herself was dying of starvation, yet she refused the entrance of charity at her door, and dared her man to surrender. He died later at Ypres. He died because of that very quality of his which moved his masters and superiors to anger; he refused at Ypres, as he did in Dockland, like those who were with him and were of his kind, to do more than mock defeat when it faced him.

That figure of Nobody in sodden khaki,

cumbered with ugly gear, its precious rifle wrapped in rags, no brightness anywhere about it except the light of its eyes (did those eyes mock us, did they reproach us, when they looked into ours in Flanders?), its face seamed with lines which might have been dolorous, which might have been ironic, with the sweat running from under its steel casque, looms now in the memory, huge, statuesque, silent but questioning, like an overshadowing challenge, like a gigantic legendary form charged with tragedy and drama; and its eyes, seen in memory again, search us in privacy. Yet that figure was the "Cuthbert." It was derided by those onlookers who were not fit to kneel and touch its muddy boots. It broke the Hindenburg Line. Its body was thrown to fill the trenches it had won, and was the bridge across which our impatient guns drove in pursuit of the enemy.

What is that figure now? An unspoken thought, which charges such names as Bullecourt, Cambrai, Bapaume, Croiselles, Hooge, and a hundred more, with the sound and premonition of a vision of midnight and all

unutterable things. We see it in a desolation of the mind, a shape forlorn against the alien light of the setting of a day of dread, the ghost of what was fair, but was broken, and is lost.

BOOKWORMS

January 18, 1919. In Fleet Street yesterday there was at lunch with us an American Army officer who discoursed heartily about a certain literary public-house. He quoted a long passage from Dickens showing how somebody took various turnings near Fetter Lane, easily to be recognized, till they arrived at this very tavern. Such enthusiasm is admirable, yet embarrassing. In return, I inquired after several young American poets, whose work, seldom seen here, interests me, and I named their books. He had never heard of them. This enthusiast did not even appear to have the beginning of an idea that his was unforgivable ignorance seeing that he knew more than a native ought to know about some of our taverns. Had he been an Englishman and a friend of mine I should have told him that I thought his love of letters was as spurious as the morality of the curate who speaks in a trembling baritone about changes in the divorce laws, but

who accepts murder without altering the statutory smile of benediction.

Literature would be lighter without that scroll work and top hamper. It has nothing to do with its life. It is as helpful to us as wall-texts and those wonders we know as works of Pure Thought. Let us remember all the noble volumes of philosophy and metaphysics we ought to have read, to learn how wonderfully far our brains have taken us beyond the relic of Piltdown; and then recall what Ypres was like, and buy a teetotum instead. That much is saved. Now we need not read them. If we feel ourselves weakening towards such idleness, let us spin tops. If we had to choose between Garvice and say Hegel or Locke for a niche in the Temple of Letters, we should make an unintelligible blunder if we did not elect Mr. Garvice without discussion. He is human, he is ingenuous and funny, and the philosophers are only loosening with the insinuations of moth and rust. The philosophers are like the great statesmen and the great soldiers—we should be happier without them. If we are not happy and enjoying

life, then we have missed the only reason for it. If books do not help us to this, if they even devise our thoughts into knots and put straws in our hair, then they ought to be burned. It is true that some of us may get pleasure from searching novels for solecisms and collecting evidence by which shall be guessed the originals of the novelist's characters, just as others extract amusement from puzzle pictures. But bookworming has the same relation to literature, even when it is done by a learned doctor in the Bodleian, as flies in a dairy with our milk supply. If most of the books in the British Museum were destroyed, we might still have a friend who would go with us to Amiens to get one more dinner in a well-remembered room, and drink to the shades; we might still, from the top of Lundy at dusk, watch the dim seas break into lilac around the Shutter Rock, while the unseen kittiwakes were voices from the past; and we might still see Miss Muffet tiptoe on a June morning to smell the first rose. That is what we look for in books, or something like it, and when it is not there they are not books to us.

SAILOR LANGUAGE

February 1, 1919. "What's in a word?" asks Admiral W. H. Smyth, with ironic intent, in his *Sailors' Word Book*. There are people who are derided because they are inclined to hesitate over that unimportant doubt, selecting their words with a waste of time which is grievous, when the real value of the sovereign is but nine-and-ninepence, in an uneconomic desire to be as right as their knowledge will allow. There is something to be said for them. There is a case to be made for getting a task finished as well as one knows how, if interest in it was sufficient to prompt a beginning. A friend of mine, who could write a thousand interesting and popular words about an event, or even about nothing in particular, while I was still wondering what I ought to do with it, once exclaimed in indignation and contempt when I put in a plea for Roget and his *Thesaurus*. He declared that a writer

who used such a reference-book ought to be deprived of his paper and ink. *He* never used even a dictionary. His argument and the force of it humbled me, for I gathered that when he wrote he had but to put his hand in his pocket and pull out all the words he wanted by the fistful. I envy him. I wish I could do it, but there are times when every word I try seems opaque. It is useless to pretend that Roget is of material assistance then ; for what remedy is there under heaven for the slow and heavy mind ? But to me Roget is full of amusing suggestions, which would really have been very helpful to me had I wanted to use his words for any other purpose than the one in hand. It is true he rarely gives you the word you think you want, but not seldom in his assorted heaps of unused ornaments you are surprised by a glance of colour from an unsuspected facet of a common word.

The *Sailors' Word Book* is no pamphlet ; not in the least the kind of pocket book which once helped hurried British soldiers in a French shop to get fried eggs.

It weighs, I should think, seven pounds, and it is packed with the vocabulary which has been built into the British ship during the thousand years and more of her growth. The origin of very many of the words retires, often beyond exact definition, into the cold mists of the prehistoric Baltic, and to the Greek Islands, among the shadows of the men who first found the courage to lose sight of the hills. Commonly they are short words, smoothed by constant use till they might be imagined to be born of the circumstances in which they are known, like the gulls and the foam of the wake. They carry like detonations in a gale. Yet quite often such words, when they are verbs, were once of the common stock of the language, as in the case of " belay," and it has happened that the sailor alone has been left to keep them alive. Dr. Johnson seems not to have known the meaning of the verb " to belay," among the other things he did not know but was very violent about. He thought it was a sea-phrase for splicing a rope, just as he supposed " main-sheet " was the largest sail of a ship.

The *Sailors' Word Book* would be much more interesting than it is, though greatly heavier, if the derivation of the words were given, or even guessed at, a method which frequently makes the livelier story. We begin to understand what a long voyage our ship has come when we are told that "starboard" is steer-board, the side to which the steering-paddle was made fast before the modern rudder was invented in the fourteenth century. Skeat informs us that both steor and bord are Anglo-Saxon; in fact, the latter word is the same in all the Celtic and Teutonic languages, so was used by those who first cut trees in Western Europe, and perhaps was here before they arrived to make our civilization what we know it. The opposite to starboard was larboard; but for good reason the Admiralty substituted port for larboard in 1844. Why was the left side of a ship called the port side? That term was in use before the Admiralty adopted it. It has been suggested that, as the steering-paddle was on the right side of a ship, it was good seamanship to have the harbour or port on the left hand when pilot-

ing inwards. But it is doubtful if that reason was devised by a sailor.

A few words in sea life—as fish, mere, and row—are said to be so old that the philologists refer them to the Aryans, or, as others might say, give them up as a bad job. These words appear to be common to all the sons of Adam who preferred adventurous change to security in monotony, and so signed on as slaves to a galley. Anchor we imported from the Greeks—it is declared to be the oldest word from the Mediterranean in the language of our ships; admiral from the Arabs, and hammock and hurricane from the Caribs, through the Spaniards. But other words of our seamen are as native to us as our grey weather, for we brought them with other habits overseas from the North—words like hail, storm, sea, ship, sail, strand, cliff, shower, mast, and flood.

To examine words in this manner is simply to invite trouble, as did the man who assumed that "bending a sail" was done as one would bend a cane, not knowing that the sailor uses that word in the

original sense of " fastening." Once, in my ignorance, I imagined " schooner " was of Dutch origin, but was careful to refer to the invaluable Skeat. Only just in time, though. And he says that the word was born on the Clyde, grew up in New England, migrated to Holland, and then came back to us again. Once upon a time (1713), at Gloucester, Massachusetts, a man was witnessing a new fore-and-aft rigged vessel glide away on a trial trip, and exclaimed " She scoons ! " So all her kind were christened. Science of that kind is almost as good as romance.

ILLUSIONS

February 15, 1919. Southwark Street is warehouses and railway bridges, and at its best is not beautiful; but when at night it is a deep chasm through which whirl cataracts of snow, and the paving is sludge, then, if you are at one end of it, the other end is as far away as joy. I was at one end of it, and at the other was my train, due to leave in ten minutes. Yet as there was a strike, there might be no train, and so I could not lose it; I had that consolation while judging that, with more than half a mile of snow and squall intervening from the north-east, I could not do the length of the street in ten minutes. So I surrendered the train which might not run to whoever was able to catch it, and in that instant of renunciation the dark body of a motor lorry skidded to the kerb and stopped beside me. A voice that was as passionless as destiny told me to hop up, if I were going

towards the station. The headlong lorry, the sombre masses of the buildings which were now looming through the diminishing snow, and the winter's night, roused a fancy of another place, much like it, or else the snow and the night made it seem like it, and so my uppermost thought became too personal, unimportant, and curious for converse. All I said, as I took my place beside the steering wheel, was: "It's a wretched night." (But I might have been alone in the lorry. There was no immediate answer.) I communed secretly with my memory. Then the voice returned out of the darkness. It startled me. "This corner," it remarked, "always reminds me of a bit of Armentières." The voice had answered my thought and not my words.

The lorry stopped and I got down. I never saw the driver. I do not know whose voice it was; if, indeed, there was with me in that lorry more than a shadow and an impersonal voice.

Yet now the night could do its worst. I had the illusion that I had seen through it. Were these bleak and obdurate circum-

stances an imposture? They appeared to have me imprisoned helplessly in time and snow; yet I had seen them shaken, and by a mere thought. Did their appearance depend on the way we looked at them? Perhaps it was that. We are compelled by outside things to their mould, and are mortified; but occasionally they fail to hide the joke. The laugh becomes ours, and circumstance must submit to the way we see it. If Time playfully imprisons us in a century we would rather have missed, where only the stars are left undisturbed to wink above the doings and noises of Bedlam, and where to miss the last train—supposing it runs at all—is the right end to a perfect day of blizzards and social squalls, what does it matter when we find that the whole of it is shaken by a single idea? Might it not vanish altogether if enough of us could be found to laugh at it? This dream assisted me to some warmth of mind through the rest of the cold night till I arrived on the station platform, after the train had left.

To help further in destroying my faith in the permanence of our affairs and institu-

tions, it then appeared the platform was vacant because my train was not yet in. It was coming in at that moment—or so a porter told me. Our protean enemy took his most fearful form in the War when he became a Hidden Hand. Was this porter an agent of the gods for whose eternal leisure our daily confusion and bad temper make an amusing diversion? Was he one of the malicious familiars who are at work amongst us, disguised, and who playfully set us by the ears with divine traps for boobies? This porter was grinning. He went away with his hand over his mouth, and at that moment a train stopped at the platform. The engine was at the wrong end of it.

One official told me its proper locomotive was at East Grinstead, and that we might not get it. Perhaps its home was there. And yet another official whose face was as mysterious as that of the station clock, which was wearing a paper mask, said that the engine of my train had, in fact, gone. It had gone to Brighton. He did not know why. It had gone alone. I turned vacantly

from this bewilderment and saw a man with the sort of golden beard an immortal might have worn standing under a station lamp, and breaking now and then into peals of merriment, occasioned, it seemed to me, by what the first porter was telling him. Then both of them looked towards me, and stopped. If in one more gust of hearty laughter that hollow wilderness of a station had vanished, gloom and dreary echoes and frozen lights, and I had found myself blinking in a surprising sunlight at that fellow in the golden beard, while he continued to laugh at me in another world than this, where he was revealed for what he was, I was in the mind for placid acceptance. Well, the miraculous transformation was as likely as an engine for that train.

The bearded one approached me. I did not run away. I waited for the next thing. He had a book under his arm, and it is likely that the gods, who have no need to learn the truth, never read books. "If," he told me, "you want to get to Sheepwash, you had better take this other train. It is

going half the way. The engine for the train for Sheepwash can't be found."

We both boarded the train for half the journey, and it did not appear to have any other passengers. Yet, reckless of the risks I was taking in travelling alone with a suspected being at such a time—for where might not he and the train go ?—I accepted the chance ; and as I took my seat, and regarded that bright beard, the shadow of my awful doubt became really serious, for only this week I have been reading *The Twilight of the Gods*. There was the disintegrating recollection of that book, with its stories of homeless immortals in search of new and more profitable employ ; and there had been a bodiless voice in a motor lorry which ignored what I said but spoke instead to an inconsequential memory of mine that was strictly private ; and there was the levity with which uniformed officials treated the essential institutions of civilization. All this gave me the sensation that even the fixed policy of our strong government might, at any moment now, roll up as a scroll.

Off we went. My fellow-traveller was silent, though he was smiling at something which was not in the carriage, to my knowledge. When he spoke, his eyes were not fixed on me. He looked into the air, and talked to whatever it was he saw. He pointed a finger at the lights of the city lying beyond and below our carriage window. "All they've built," he said, "stands only on a few odd notions. Now they're changing their notions, so down comes everything with a run. And don't they look surprised and pained!" (I felt like an eavesdropper, and thought I'd better show him I was present.) I apologized for overhearing him. He nodded shortly, a little condescendingly. "We've accepted *that*"—he poked his stick towards where stood our Imperial city in the night—"as if it came by itself. We never knew our city was like that just because we never saw it in any other light. Now we're upset to find the magic-lantern picture is fading. Got to put up with it, though." His book had been on the seat. It fell to the floor, and I picked it up and handed it to him. It was *The Twilight of the Gods*.

If I could have remembered at that moment one of the simple dodges for averting the evil eye I should have used it. The laughing malice of that book had so confused me for some days that I had begun to feel that even St. Paul's, a blue bubble floating over London on the stream of Time, might vanish, as bubbles will. The Hidden Hand, I began to believe, had something in it.

I intrigued a serious interview with my fellow-passenger, hoping to find evidence; and then the train stopped finally, six miles from home. At that very instant of time the train which we had previously rejected because it had no engine chose to run express through the station where we stood.

FIGURE-HEADS

March 1, 1919. When the car got to the Board of Trade Office, which is opposite the old chapel of ease where the crews of John Company's ships "used to worship," as a local history tells us, I saw Uncle Dave by the kerb, with time apparently on his hands. I got down.

He told me old Jackson is dead. Jackson was a mast and block maker, but his fame was the excellence of his figure-heads. It is many years since old Jackson made one, but if it is doubted that he was an artist, there is a shop near where he once lived which still displays three of his images, the size of life, reputed to have been conjured from baulks of timber with an axe. I remember Jackson. He rarely answered you when you questioned him about those ships to which he had given personality and eyes that looked sleeplessly overseas from their prows. He regarded you, and

only his whiskers moved in silent indifference (he chewed), as though you were wasting the time of a man and an artist. Those images of his were all of women. He would make no figure-head for a ship bearing the name of a man, though it were that of a Greek hero. And, of course, you dare not even think of the trousered legs of a modern man stuck each side of a ship's prow, boots and all; but the drapery of a woman flows with grace there. She would look indeed its vigilant guardian spirit. It would be pleasing to write of some of the more famous of those idols, as I remember them in repose, above the quays of the docks.

Here we were joined by some young men who knew Uncle Dave. They were looking for a ship. But Uncle continued to tell me of the merits of his friend the maker of figure-heads. A stoker became a trifle irritated. "Well, what's the good of 'em, anyway?" he interjected. "Lumber, I call 'em. They can't be carried on straight stems, and clipper-bows aren't wanted these days, wasting good metal. Why, even Thompson's White Star liners have chucked

that sort of truck. They're not built like it now. What's the good of figger-'eds ? "

This youth's casual blasphemy in the presence of Uncle Dave (who once was bo'sun of a China clipper), extolling as he did his age of mere machines against the virtues of an age when ships were expected to look good as well as do good things, made us shrink in anticipation of the storm. For Uncle Dave has a habit of listening to a talk about ships in a deliberate and contemptuous silence, with nothing to show of his inward heat but a baleful light in the eye. He does not like steamers. He does not think steamer-men are seamen. He declares they can never be seamen. And now we waited, dreading that his anger, when it burst, would be quite incoherent with force. There was really something of hatred in his look as he gazed at the youngster, his mouth a little open, his hand holding his trembling pipe just away from his mouth, which had forgotten it. The old sailor bent forward, screwing his eyes at this young man as though trying to believe it was real.

An older hand interposed. " Ah, come

away now! I've heard chaps make game of figger-'eds, an' call 'em superstition. But I say let such things alone. I know things that's happened to funny fellows through making game of figger-'eds. There was the *Barbadian Lass*. She was a brigantine. She used to run to Trinidad. There was something queer about her figger-'ed. It was a half-breed woman. She was smiling. She had bare breasts, and she used to wear earrings. Her chaps used to keep a spare pair for her in a box. She was always fresh and bright, but I've heard say she was never painted—no, not since the day the ship was launched. She kept like that. And one day young Belfast MacCormick slipped a tar-brush over her dial. Said it was idolatry. And what happened to him? You answer me that!"

"Yes, I know," broke in one of us. "But you can't say it was along of that tar-brush . . ."

"You young chaps ain't got no sense," here interrupted Uncle, his voice evidently under control, but shaky. "I'd like to know where you were brought up. You

learn it all wrong at them schools of yours, and you never get it right afterwards. You learn about the guts of engines and 'lectricity, and you mix it up with the tales your grandmothers told you, and you get nothing straight. What you've got is all science and superstition. And then you wonder why you make a mess of it. Listen! It don't matter what you do to a figger-'ed, if you're fool enough to spoil it. It's having it that matters. It's something to go by, and a ship you're glad to work in."

He turned on the stoker. There was astonishment and pity in his glance. "Look at you. In and out of a ship, and you forget her name when you've signed off. You don't care the leavings in a Dago's mess-kid for any ship you work in, if you can get a bit out of her and skip early."

"That's me, Uncle," muttered the stoker.

"Can you remember names, like some of us remember the *Mermerus*, the *Blackadder*, and the *Titania?* Not you. Your ships haven't got names, properly speaking. They're just a run out and home again for you, and a row about the money and the grub."

"Sure to be a row about the grub," murmured the stoker.

"What are ships nowadays?" he went on, raising a shaking index finger. "Are they ships at all? They're run by companies on the make, and worked by factory hands who curse their own house-flags. It's a dirty game, I call it. Things are all wrong. I can't make them out. You fellers take no pride in your work, and you've got no work to take pride in. You don't know who you work for or what, and your ships got no names. They might be damned goods vans. No good in a figger-'ed! Then I'll tell you this. *You'll* get no good till you learn better, my lad."

ECONOMICS

March 22, 1919. There is an astonishing number of books on what is called Reconstruction in the new publications of this spring. Reconstruction seems to be as easy as conscription or destruction. We have only to change our mind, and there we are, as though nothing had happened. It is the greatest wonder of the human brain that its own accommodating ratiocination never affords it any amusement. We use reason only to make convincing disguises for our desires and appetites. Perhaps it is fear of the wrath to come that is partly responsible for the clamour of the economists and sociologists in the publishers' announcements, almost drowning there the drone of the cataract of new novels. But it is too late now. The wrath will come. After mischievously bungling with the magic which imprisoned the Djinn, we may wish we had not done it; but once he is out there

is nothing for it but to be surprised and sorry. The lid is off; and it is useless for the clever reconstructionists to press in upon us with their little screw-drivers, chattering eagerly about locks and hinges. When the crafty but ignorant Russian generals and courtiers got from the Czar the order for mobilizing the armies, and issued it, they did not know it, but that was when they released Lenin. And who on earth can now inveigle that terrific portent safely under lid and lock again?

OLD SUNLIGHT

April 5, 1919. I find the first signs of this spring, now the War is over, almost unbelievable. I have watched this advent with astonishment, as though it were a phantom. The feeling is the same as when waking from an ugly dream, and seeing in doubt the familiar objects in a morning light. They seem steadfast. Are they real, or is the dream? The morning works slowly through the mind to take the place of the night. Its brightness and tranquillity do not seem right. And is it not surprising to find the spring has come again to this world? The almond tree might be an untimely, thoughtless, and happy stranger. What does it want with us? That spiritual and tinted fire with which its life burns touches and kindles no responsive and volatile essence in us. I passed a hedge-bank which looked south and was reviving. There were crumbs and nuggets of chalk in it, and they were as remarkable to me this year

as though I had once seen those flecks of white showing through the herbage of another planet. That crumbling earth with the grey matting of old grass was as warm to the touch as though some inner virtue had grown, all unsuspected by us, in the heart of this glacial ball. I picked up a lump of chalk with its cold greenish shadows, and powdered it in my fingers, wondering why it looked so suddenly bright. It confirmed my existence. Its smell was better than any news I have heard of late.

I saw suddenly the gleaming coast of a continent of dark cloud, and the blue ocean into which it jutted its headlands; memory had suddenly returned. At that moment the sun touched my hand. All this was what we used to know in a previous life. When I got home I took down *Selborne*. Two photographs fell out of it, and when I picked them up—they were those of a young amateur and were yellow with age—spring really began to penetrate the bark. But it was not the spring of this year.

How often, like another tortoise, has the mind come out of its winter to sun itself

in the new warmth of a long-gone Selborne April? Did Gilbert White imagine he was bequeathing light to us? Of course not. He lived quietly in the obscure place where he was born, and did not try to improve or influence anybody. It seems he had no wish to be a great leader, or a great thinker, or a great orator. The example of Chatham did not fire him. He was friendly with his neighbours, but went about his business. When he died there did not appear to be any reason whatever to keep him in memory. He had harmed no man. He left us without having improved gunpowder. Could a man have done less?

Think of the events which were stirring men while he was noting the coming and going of swallows. While he lived, Clive began the conquest of India, and Canada was taken from the French. White heard the news that our American colonists had turned Bolshevik because of the traditional skill of the administrators of other people's affairs at Whitehall. The world appears to have been as full then of important uproar as it is to-day. I suppose the younger Pitt,

"the youngest man ever appointed Prime Minister," had never heard of White. But Gilbert does not seem to have heard of *him;* nor of Hargreaves' spinning jenny, nor of the inventor of the steam-engine. "But I can show you some specimens of my new mice," he remarks on March 30, 1768. That was the year in which the great Pitt resigned. His new mice!

Yet for all the stirring affairs and inventions of his exciting time, with war making and breaking empires, and the foundations of this country's wealth and power being nobly laid, it would not be easy to show that we to-day are any the happier. Our own War was inherent in the inventions of mechanical cotton-spinning and the steam-engine—the need to compel foreign markets to buy the goods we made beyond our own needs. We know now what were the seeds the active and clever fellows of Gilbert's day were sowing for us. We were present at the harvesting. Why did not those august people, absorbed in the momentous deeds which have made history so sonorous, the powder shaking out of their wigs with the awful

gravity of their labours (while all the world wondered), just stop doing such consequential things, and accept Gilbert's invitation to go and listen to him about those new mice? The mice might have saved us, and the opportunity was lost.

Looking back at those times, of all the thunderous events which then loosened excited tongues, caused by high-minded men of action expertly conjuring crisis after crisis while their docile followers scrambled out of one sublime trouble into another, heated and exhausted, but still gaping with obedience and respect, we can see that nothing remains but the burial parties, whose work is yet uncompleted in France. What good does persist out of those days is the light in which Gilbert's tortoise sunned itself. It is a light which has not gone out. And it makes us wonder, not how much of our work in these years will survive to win the gratitude of those who will follow us, but just what it is they will be grateful for. Where is it, and what happy man is doing it? And what are we thinking of him? Do we even know his name?

RUSKIN

April 19, 1919. Some good people have been celebrating Ruskin, whose centenary it is. And to-day a little friend of mine left her school books so that I might wonder what they were when I saw them on my table. One of them was *The Crown of Wild Olive.* It put me in a reminiscent mood. I looked at Ruskin's works on my shelves, and tried to recall how long it was since they interested me. Nevertheless, I would not part with them. In my youth Ruskin's works were only for the wealthy, and I remember that my purchase of those volumes was an act of temerity, and even of sacrifice. And who but an ingrate would find fault with Ruskin, or would treat him lightly? With courage and eloquence he denounced dishonesty in the days when it was not supposed that cheating could be wrong if it were successful. He did that when minds were so dark that people blinked with surprise at a light which showed as a

social iniquity naked children crawling with chains about them in the galleries of coal-mines. Was it really wrong to make children do that? Or was Ruskin only an impossible idealist? They were the happy years, radiant with the certain knowledge of the British that the Holy Grail would be recognized immediately it was seen, for over it would be proudly floating the confirmatory Union Jack. We had not even begun to suspect that our morals, manners, and laws were fairly poor compared with the standards of the Mohawks and Mohicans whom our settlers had displaced in America a century before. And Ruskin told that Victorian society it had an ugly mind, and did ugly things. When Ruskin said so, with considerable emotion, Thackeray was so hurt that he answered as would any clever editor to-day about a contribution which convinced him that it would make readers angry; he told Ruskin it would never do. Thackeray's readers, of course, were assured they were the best people, and that worldly cynic did well to reject Ruskin, and preserve the *Cornhill Magazine.*

"Ruskin," it says in the introduction to *The Crown of Wild Olive* which my little friend reads at school, "is certainly one of the greatest masters of English prose." That has often been declared. But is he? Or is our tribute to Ruskin only a show of gratitude to one who revealed to us the unpleasant character of our national habits when contrasted with a standard for gentlemen? It ought not to have required much eloquence to convince us that Widnes is unlovely; the smell of it should have been enough. It is curious that we needed festoons of chromatic sentences to warn us that cruelty to children, even when profit can be made of it, is not right. But I fear some people really enjoy remorseful sobbing. It is half the fun of doing wrong. Yet I would ask in humility—for it is a fearful thing to doubt Ruskin, the literary divinity of so many right-thinking people—whether English children who are learning the right way to use their language, and the noblest ideas to express, should run the risk of having Ruskin's example set before them by soft-hearted teachers? I think that a parent who knew

a child of his, on a certain day, was to take the example of Ruskin as a prose stylist on the subject of war, would do well, on moral and æsthetic grounds, to keep his child away from school on that day to practise a little roller-skating. For humility and gratitude should not blind us to the fact that few writers in English of Ruskin's reputation have ever considered such a rosy cloud of rhetoric as is his lecture on war, in which a reasonable shape no sooner looms than it is lost again, to be worth preserving. The subject of war is of importance, inflammable humanity being what it is, and the results of war being what we know ; and the quality of the critical attention we give to so great a matter is unfortunately clear when we regard the list of distinguished critics of letters who have accepted, apparently without difficulty, as great prose, Ruskin's heedless rush of words upon it. Perhaps his language appears noble because the rhythmic pour of its sentences lulls reason into a comfortable and benignant sleepiness.

I remember the solemn voice of a lecturer on English literature, years ago, moving

me to buy *The Crown of Wild Olive.* Such obvious ignorance as I knew mine to be could not be tolerated. Whatever I went without, it could not be that book. I put it in my hold-all when, as was my duty, I went for my training with the artillery volunteers. I read in camp the essay on war, when bombardiers no longer claimed my attention, and the knightly words of sergeant instructors were taking a needed rest. I pondered over that essay, and concluded that though plainly I was very young and very wrong to feel puzzled and even derisive over English prose which fascinated a learned lecturer into solemnity, yet I would sooner learn to make imitation flowers of wool than read that essay to a critical audience, especially if I had written it myself.

Ruskin, in fact, with no more experience of war than a bishop's wife, did not know what he was talking about. Throughout the essay, too, he is in two minds. One is that of a gentleman who knows that war is the same phenomenon, artistically, ethically, and socially, as a public-house riot with broken bottles caused by a dispute

over one of those fundamental principles which are often challenged in such a place. Those riots are natural enough. They are caused by the nature of man. They continue to happen, for it has taken the Church longer to improve our manners than it has taken stock-raisers to improve the milking qualities of kine. And Ruskin's other mind is still in the comical Tennysonian stage about war, dwelling with awe on swords and shields, glory, honour, patriotism, courage, spurs, pennants, and tearful but resolute ladies who wave their handkerchiefs in the intervals of sobbing over their "loved ones."

He calls war "noble play." He scorns cricket. As for his "style" and his "thought": "I use," says Ruskin, "in such a question, the test which I have adopted, of the connexion of war with other arts, and I reflect how, as a sculptor, I should feel if I were asked to design a monument for Westminster Abbey, with a carving of a bat at one end and a ball at the other. It may be there remains in me only a savage Gothic prejudice; but I had rather carve it with a shield at one end and a sword at the other."

I cannot tell whether Ruskin reflected so because of a savage Gothic prejudice, but I am certain he wrote like that moved by what we feel—the feeling goes deeper into time even than the Goths—about the victim for sacrifice. We must justify that sacrifice, and so we give it a ceremonial ritual and dignity. Otherwise, I think, Ruskin would not have suggested the shield and sword as the symbolic decorations. He felt instinctively and because of a long-accepted tradition that those antique symbols were the only way to hide the ugly look of the truth. For certainly he could have used a ball at one end—a cannon-ball—and a mortar at the other. Just as we might use an aerial torpedo at one end, and the image of a mutilated child at the other ; or a gas cylinder at one end, and a gasmask at the other. But the artist is not going to be deprived of his romance through a touch of the actual, any more than the lady with the handkerchief can be expected to forgo her anguished sob over her hero as he goes forth to battle.

We saw that in our Great War. The

ancient appeal of the patriots rushed us away from reason with "last stands," and the shot-riddled banners wavering in the engulfing waves of barbarians, till an irresistible cavalry charge scattered the hordes. All this replaced the plumes, the shining armour, and the chivalrous knights. Ruskin, however, was a subtle improvement even on the last stand with the shot-riddled banner. He anticipated those who have been most popular because they made our War entrancing and endurable. He went to the heart of the matter. He knew that the audience which would the more readily agree with him when he made an emotional case for the ennobling nature of war would be mainly of reclused women. He addressed them. So did, of late, some of our most successful writers on war. They, like Ruskin, made their appeal to that type of mind which obtains a real satisfaction, a sensuous pleasure, from contemplating the unseen sufferings of the young and vicarious victim, sobbing, and feeling noble and enduring.

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

May 9, 1919. The Treaty of Peace is published. Compared with what the innocent in 1915 called the "objects of the War," this treaty is as the aims of Captain Morgan's ruffians to those of the Twelve Apostles. The truth is, some time ago the Versailles drama fell to the level of an overworked newspaper story which shrewd editors saw was past its day. Those headlines, Humiliate the Hun, Hang the Kaiser, and Make Germany Pay, had become no more interesting than a copy of last week's *Morning Mischief* in a horse-pond. The subject was old and wet. Because five months ago we thoughtfully elected men of the counting-house to the work of governing the State, of late we have been too indignant over the cost and difficulty of living to spare a thought for the beauty of Peace; that is why we are now examining the clauses of the famous

Treaty with about as much care for what they may mean to us as if they concerned the movements of the asteroids. A year ago the German attacks seemed near to making guns the deciding voice in the affairs of unhappy humanity. On the chill and overcast spring morning when the Treaty was published, it was significant that those very few men to whom we could go for courage a year ago were the only people dismayed by the terms of the Peace Treaty. And the timid, who once went to those stout hearts for assurance—to have, as the soldiers used to say, their cold feet massaged—were the bright and cheerful souls. It was ominous. Yet those careless and happy hearts are not so trying to me as the amiable but otherwise sensible men who were sure our statesmen would not betray the dead, and who are incredulous over the Treaty now they see what it clearly intends to convey. They cannot believe that the War, which they thought began as a war of liberation, a struggle of Europe to free itself from the intolerable bonds of its past, continues in the Peace Treaty as a force malignantly

deflected to the support of the very evils out of which August, 1914, arose. Then did they imagine the well-meaning leopard would oblige by changing his spots if spoken to kindly while he was eating the baby?

GREAT STATESMEN

May 31, 1919. What is wrong with our statesmen? I think the answer is simple. Success in a political career can be understood by all of us. It attracts the attention which applauds the owner of a Derby winner, or the Bishop who began as a poor, industrious, but tactful child. John the Baptist failed to attract the publicity he desired; and Christ drew it as a criminal, for the religious and political leaders of his day recognized what his teaching would lead to as easily as would any magistrate to-day who had before him a carpenter accused of persuading soldiers that killing is murder. Politicians move on the level of the common intelligence, and compete there with each other in charging the ignorance of the commonalty with emotion. A politician need be no more than something between a curate and a card-sharper. If he knows anything of the arts, of history, of economics, or of science, he

had better forget it, or else use it as a forestaller would a knowledge of the time when prices should be raised. A confident man with a bloodshot voice and a gift for repartee is sure to make a success of politics, especially if he is not too particular. This did not matter once, perhaps, when politics merely afforded excitement for taverns and a career for the avid and meddlesome. The country was prosperous, and so it was difficult to do it serious harm.

But to-day, just when we must have the leading of moral, judicious, and well-informed minds, or perish, we have only our statesmen. It never occurs to the crowd that its business would be more successfully transacted by a chance group, say of headmasters of elementary schools, than by the statesmen who, at Versailles recently, dared not face the shocking realities because these could not be squared with a Treaty which had to frame the figments of the hustings. The trouble with our statesmen is that they have been concerned hitherto merely to attend to the machinery, running freely and with little friction, of industrial

society. They did not create that machinery. They but took it over. They knew nothing of the principles which motived it. Our statesmen were only practical politicians and business men. They held in contempt the fine abstract theories of physics, mechanics, and dynamics. It was safe for them to do so. The machinery went on running, apparently of its own volition. All went well until the War. Now the propeller-shaft of industrial society is fractured, our ship is wallowing in the trough of the seas, and the men who should put things right for us do not even know that it is the main shaft on which they should concentrate. They are irritating the passengers by changing the cabins, confiscating luggage, insisting on higher fares, cutting down the rations, and instructing the sailors in the goose-step; but the ship has no way on her, and the sound of breakers grows louder from a sombre, precipitous, and unknown coast.

JOY

July 19, 1919. It has come. This is the great day of the English. Many have doubted whether we should ever have it, for faith had been weak and the mind weary while the enemy was still fixed in his fanatic resolution. But here it is, half my window-blind already bright with its first light. To-day we celebrate our return to peace, to an earth made the fairer for children, fit for the habitation of free men, safe for quiet folk. . . . the day that once had seemed as remote as truth, as inaccessible as good fortune ; a day, so we used to think in France, more distant even than those incredible years of the past that were undervalued by us, when we were happy in our ignorance of the glory men could distil from misery and filth ; when we had not guessed what wealth could be got from the needs of a public anxious for its life ; nor that sleeping children could be bombed at midnight in a

noble cause. Yes, it had seemed to us even farther off than our memories of the happy past. Yet here it is, its coffee-cups tinkling below, and I welcome its early shafts of gold like the fortune they are. The fortune seems innocent and unaware of its nature. It does not know what it means to us. I had often been with soldier friends across the water when with mock rapture they had planned an itinerary for this day. They spoke of it where their surroundings made the thought of secure leisure or unremarkable toil only a painful reminder of what was beatific, but might never be. This day had not come to them. But it had come to me.

I was luckier than they. Yet when luck comes to us, does it ever look quite as we had imagined it when it was not ours? I lift the curtain on this luck, and look out. From an upper window of the house opposite the national emblem of the American Republic is hanging like an apron. Next door to it a man is decorating his window-sills with fairy lamps, and from his demeanour he might be devising a taboo against evil.

I see no other sign that the new and better place of our planet was being acknowledged. The street is as the milkman and the postman have always known it on a quiet morning.

A cock crowed. It was then I knew that, though the morning was like all good sunrises, which are the same for the unjust and the righteous, I, somehow, was different. Chanticleer was quite near, but his confident and defiant voice, I recognized with a start, was a call from some other morning. It was the remembered voice of life at sunrise, as old as the jungle, alert, glad, and brave. Then why did it not sound as if it were meant for me? Why did it not accord, as once it did, with the coming of a new day, when the renewed and waiting earth was veritably waiting for us? Yet the morning seemed the same, its sounds the familiar confidences, its light the virgin innocence of a right beginning. Was this new light ours? While looking at it I thought that perhaps there is another light, an aura of something early and rare, which, once it is doused, cannot be rekindled, even by

the sun which rises to shine on a great victory.

I began to feel that this early confusion of thought, over even so plain a cause for joy as morning, might be a private hint that it would be as hard to tell the truth about peace as it used to be about battle. And how difficult it is to tell the truth about war, and even how improper, some of us know. For what a base traitor even truth may be to good patriots, when she insists that her mirror cannot help reflecting what is there! Why should the best instincts of loyal folk be thus embarrassed? If they do not wish to know what is there, when that is what it is like, is it right, is it gentlemanly, to show them?

How easy it would be to write of peace in the Capital, where the old highways have been decorated for many kings, marshals, and admirals, and the flags have been hung for victories since England first bore arms. So why should one be dubious of a few unimportant suburban byways, where the truth is plain, and is not charged with many emotions through the presence of an emperor and his statesmen and soldiers, all of them

great, all of them ready for our superlatives to add to their splendour?

But perhaps the more you know of a place, the greater is your perplexity. That old vicarage wall, lower down my street, is merely attractive in the sun of Peace Day. A stranger, if he noticed it, might at the most admire its warm tones, and the tufts of hawkweed and snapdragon which are scattered on its ledges. But from this same window, on a winter morning, when affairs were urgent in France, I have seen youth assembled by that wall. Youth was silent. There was only a sergeant's voice in all the street. I think I hear now the diminishing trampling of quick feet marching away; and see a boy's face as he turned near the top of the rise to wave his hand. But look now, and say where are the shades on a bright morning!

I went out, a dutiful citizen, to celebrate. No joy can be truthfully reported till just this side of the High Street, where there were three girls with linked arms dancing in lax and cheerful oblivion, one of them quite drunk. Near them stood a cart with a man, a woman,

and a monkey in it. The superior animals were clothed in red, white, and blue, and the monkey was wearing a Union Jack for a ruff. The ape was humping himself on the tail-board, and from his expression he might have been wondering how long all this would last. His gay companions were rosily chanting that if they caught someone bending it would be of no advantage to him. The main thoroughfare was sanded, and was waiting for the official procession. Quiet citizens were strolling about with their children, and what they were thinking is as great a mystery as what the populace at Memphis thought when the completion of the Great Pyramid was celebrated by the order of Cheops. In a room of an upper storey near the town hall a choir was singing the Hallelujah Chorus, and below, on the pavement, a hospital nurse, in a red wig, stood gravely listening, swaying to and fro, holding her skirts high, so that we saw beneath the broad slacks of an able seaman.

The chorus ceased, and in gratitude for the music the nurse embraced a Highland soldier, who was standing near and who was

secretly amused, I believe, by the nurse's trousers. Then we heard the bands of the military procession in the distance, and it was in that moment I saw a young officer I knew, who was out as early as Neuve Chapelle, gazing, like everybody else, in the direction of the martial sounds. Before I could reach him through the press he had turned, and was walking hurriedly down a side street, as though in flight. I could not follow him. I wanted to see the soldiers. My reason was no better than some sentimental emotion; for I saw the original Contemptibles march off for Mons; and was with a battalion of the 9th Division, the first of Kitchener's men to go into the line; and saw the Derby men come out and begin; and at the last discovered that the conscripts were as good as the rest. Some of the survivors were marching towards me.

But I did not recognize them. Many were elderly men who were displaying proud tunics of volunteer regiments as old as Hyde Park Parades by Queen Victoria. One looked then for the sections from the local lodges of the Druids, Odd-

fellows, Buffaloes, and the He-Goats. There was the band of the local cadets, spontaneous in its enthusiasm, its zest for martial music no different, of course. Just behind these lads a strange figure walked in the procession, a bent and misshapen old man, whose face had no expression but a fixed and hypnotic stare. He was keeping time to the measure of the boys' music by snapping the spring of a mouse-trap which he held aloft. I could not find him in the program. Was he also drunk? Or was he a terrible jest? Most of our triumphant display followed this figure. If our illusions go, what is left to us? Ah, our memories of the Somme! That young officer who turned away when he saw Triumph approaching acted on a right instinct.

There is a hilltop near us. It looks to other hills over a great space of southern England, and at night on the far promontories of the Downs bonfires were to be lighted. I have no doubt signals flared from them when the Romans were baffled. Again to-night they would signal that the latest enemy had been vanquished.

It was raining gently, and from our own crest the lower and outer night was void. A touch of distant phosphorescence that waned, and intensified again to a strong white glow, presently gave the void one far and lonely hilltop. A cloud elsewhere appeared out of nothing, and persisted, a lenticular spectre of dull fire. These aerial spectres became a host; some were so far away that they were faint smears of orange, and others so near and great that they pulsed and revealed the shapes of the clouds. It was all impersonal, it was England itself that was reflected, the hills that had awakened. It was the emanation of a worthy tradition, older than ourselves, that was rekindled and was glowing, and that would be here when we are not. It was so receptive, it was so spacious, that our gravest memories could abide there, as if night were kind to the secrets we dare not voice, and understood folly and remorse, and could protect our better visions, and had sanctuary and consolation for that grief which looks to what might have been, but now can never be.

A spark glittered near, a spark that

towered and hovered overhead, and burst into coiling volumes of lurid smoke with a moving heart of flame. Light broke on a neighbouring hill that had been unseen and forgotten ; the hill was crowned with fantastic trees that danced, and a wavering tower. From our own valley below there came a vicious tearing that gave me a momentary chill (so sounds a stream of machine-gun lead, going over), and a group of coloured stars expanded over us. Their bright light showed the night reticulated with thin lines of smoke, like veins of calcite in a canopy of black marble. Our immediate country, pallid and tremulous, faded again, but in that brief prospect of a shadow land I glimpsed a road, the presentment of the long road to Bapaume. So the Bapaume road showed at night by inconsequential and unexpected lights. That hill-crest of leaping trees could be the ridge of Loupart with its wood, and Achete in flames beyond. The notion gave me enough of our hill-top. I descended from it.

There is a public-house at the foot of the hill, and a lane of harsh noises and a beam of

light projected together from its open door across the road. Beyond it I turned into a house, for I knew I should find there an aged and solitary man who would have his own thoughts on such a night as this; for he had a son, and the spectre of the Bapaume road had reminded me where that boy was celebrating whatever peace he knew. His father was not communicative; and what could I say? He sat, answering me distantly and austerely, and he might have been a bearded sage seeing in retrospect a world he had long known, and who at last had made up his mind about it, though he would not tell me what that was. Outside we could hear revellers approaching. They paused at our door; their feet began to shuffle, and they sang:

"If I catch you bending,
I'll turn you upside down,
Knees up, knees up,
Knees up, knees up,
Knees up, Father Brown."

THE REAL THING

January 9, 1920. There was a country town of which we heard wonderful tales as children. But it was as far as Cathay. It had many of the qualities that once made Cathay desirable and almost unbelievable. We heard of it at the time when we heard of the cities of Vanity Fair and Baghdad, and all from a man with a beard, who once sat by a London fire, just before bedtime, smoking a pipe and telling those who were below him on the rug about the past, and of more fortunate times, and of cities that were fair and far. Nothing was easier for us then than to believe fair reports. Good dreams must be true, for they are good. Some day, he said, he would take us to Torhaven; but he did not, for his luck was not like that.

Nothing like that; so instead we used to look westward to where Torhaven would be, whenever the sunset appeared the right

splendour for the sky that was over what was delectable and elsewhere. We made that do for years. Torhaven existed, there was no doubt, for once we made a journey to Paddington Station—a long walk—and saw the very name on a railway carriage. It was a surprising and a happy thought that that carriage would go into such a town that very day. What is more confident than the innocence of youth? Where, if not with youth, could be found such willing and generous reliance in noble legend?

And how enduring is its faith! Long after, but not too long after, for fine appearances to us still meant fine prospects, we arrived one morning bodily in the haven of good report. Its genius was as bright as we expected. It had a shining face. It was the equal of the morning. Its folk could not be the same as those who lived within dark walls under a heaven that was usually but murk. It lost nothing because we could examine its streets. We went from it with a memory even warmer and more comforting. What would happen to us if youth did not more than merely believe the

pleasant tales that are told, if it did not loyally desire to believe that things are what they are said to be?

This country town is of the Southern kind which, with satisfaction, we show to strangers as something peculiarly of our country. It is ancient and luminous in an amphitheatre of hills, and schooners and barques come right among its gables. It is wealthy, but it is not of the common sort, for it never shows haste. It knows, of course, that wealth is cheap, until it has matured and has attained that dignity which only leisure and the indifference of usage can confer. The country around has a long history of well-sounding family names as native as its hills—they arrived together, or thereabouts—and the lodge gates on its highways, with their weathered and mossy heraldic devices, have a way of acquainting you with the measure of your inconsequence as you pass them when walking. Torhaven has no poverty. It tolerates some clean and obscure but very profitable manufactures. But its shipping is venerable, and is really not an industry at all, being as proper as the owning

of deer-parks. On market day you would think you were in a French town, so many are the agriculturists, and so quiet and solid the evidence of their well-being. They own their farms, they love good horses, their wagons are built like ships, and their cattle, as aboriginal as the county families, might be the embodiment of the sleek genius of those hills and meadows, so famous are they for cream. The people of that country live well. They know their worth and the substance which they add to the strength of the British community. And they pride themselves on the legends, peculiarly theirs, which tell of their independence of mind, of their love of freedom, of their liberal opinions and the nonconformity of their religious views. They are stout folk, kind and companionable, and they do not love masters.

It was the summer following the end of the War, and we were back again in Torhaven. The recollection of its ancient peace, of its stillness and light, of the refuge it offered, had enticed us there. Its very name had been the hope of escape. Where should

we find people more likely to be quick and responsive? They would be among the first to understand the nature of the calamity which had overtaken us. They would know, long before amorphous and alien London, what that new world should be like which we owed to the young, a world in which might grow a garden for the bruised souls of the disillusioned.

Its light was the same. It was not only untarnished by such knowledge as we brought with us, it was radiant. Yet it was not without its memory of the disaster. We went into the church, whose porch had been restored; symbolical, perhaps, of our entry into a world from which, happily, the old things had passed. The church was empty, for this was market day. Through its gloom, as through the penumbra of antiquity, shone faintly the pale forms of a few recumbent knights, and the permanent appeal of their upturned hands and faces kept the roof aware of human contrition. Above one of the figures was a new Union Jack, crowned with laurels. The sun made too vivid a scarlet patch of one of its folds.

Just below the church was the theatre, now a cinema hall. This was market day, and the house was full. A poster outside pictured a bridge blowing up, and a motor-car falling into space. The midday sun was looking full at Torhaven's High Street, which runs south and downhill steeply to the quay; a schooner filled the bottom of the street that day. Anything a not too unreasonable man could desire was offered in the shops of that thoroughfare. This being a time of change, when our thoughts are all unfixed and we have had rumours of the New Jerusalem, the side window of a fashionable jeweller's was devoted to tiny jade pigs, minute dolls, silver acorns, and other propitiators of luck which time and experience have tested. Next door to the jeweller's was a studio supporting the arts, with local pottery shaped as etiolated blue cats and yellow puppies; and there one could get picture postcards of the London favourites in revue, and some water-colour paintings of the local coast which an advertisement affirmed were real.

That was not all. Opposite was the one

bookshop of the town. Its famous bay front and old diamond panes frankly presented the new day with ladies' handbags, ludo and other games, fountain pens, mounted texts from Ella Wilcox, local guide books, and apparently a complete series—as much as the length of the window would hold, at least—of Hall Caine's works; and in one corner prayer-books in a variety of bindings.

Down on the quay, sitting on a bollard, with one leg stretched stiffly before him, was a young native I had not met since one day on the Menin Road. I had known him, before that strange occasion, as an ardent student of life and letters. He had entered a profession in which sound learning is essential, though the reward is slight, just when the War began. Then he believed, in high seriousness, as young and enthusiastic students did, all he was told in that August; and his professional career is now over.

He pointed out to me mildly, and with a little reproach, that I was wrong in supposing Torhaven had not changed. I learned

that the War had made a great change there. Motor-cars were now as commonly owned as bicycles used to be, though he admitted that it did not seem that the queue waiting to buy books, our sort of books, was in need of control by the police. But farmers who had been tenants when Germany violated the independence of Belgium were now free-holders. Men who were in essential industries, and so could not be spared for the guns, were now shipowners. We could see for ourselves how free and encouraging was the new wealth in this new world; true, the size of his pension did not fairly reflect the new and more liberal ideas of a better world, but we must admit he had no need to travel to Bond Street to spend it. "Why fear," he asked me, pointing with his crutch up the busy High Street behind us, "that what our pals in France learned was wrong with that old Europe which made the War, will not be known there? Have you seen," he said, "our bookshop, our cinema, and the new memorial porch of our church?"

Near us was waiting a resplendent motor-

car, in which reposed a young lady whose face decorates the covers of the popular magazines every month, and as the wounded soldier finished speaking it moved away with a raucous hoot.

LITERARY CRITICS

March 27, 1920. The last number of the *Chapbook*, containing "Three Critical Essays on Modern English Poetry," by three well-known critics of literature, I read with suspiciously eager attention, for I will confess that I have no handy rule, not one that I can describe, which can be run over new work in poetry or prose with unfailing confidence. My credentials as a literary critic would not, I fear, bear five minutes' scrutiny; but I never cease to look for that defined and adequate equipment, such as even a carpenter calls his tool-chest, full of cryptic instruments, each designed for some particular task, and every implement named. It is sad to have to admit it, but I know I possess only a home-made gimlet to test for dry-rot, and another implement, a very ancient heirloom, snatched at only on blind instinct, a stone axe. But these are poor tools, and sooner or later I shall be found out.

LITERARY CRITICS

There was a time when I was very hopeful about discovering a book on literary criticism which would make the rough places plain for me, and encourage me to feel less embarrassed when present where literary folk were estimating poetry and prose. I am such a simple on these occasions. If one could only discover the means to attain to that rather easy assurance and emphasis when making literary comparisons! Yet though this interesting number of the *Chapbook* said much that I could agree with at once, it left me as isolated and as helpless as before. One writer said: "There is but one art of writing, and that is the art of poetry. The test of poetry is sincerity. The test of sincerity is style; and the test of style is personality." Excellent, I exclaimed immediately; and then slowly I began to suspect a trap somewhere in it. Of course, does not the test for sunlight distinguish it at once from insincere limelight? But what is the test, and would it be of any use to those likely to mistake limelight for daylight?

I cannot say I have ever been greatly

helped by what I have read concerning the standards for literary criticism. Of the many wise and learned critics to whose works I have gone for light, I can remember only Aristotle, Longinus, Tolstoy, and Anatole France—probably because it is easy for the innocent to agree with dominating men. Of the moderns I enjoy reading anything "Q" has to say about books; useless pleasure again, for what does one get but "Q's" full, friendly, ironic, and humorous mind? Lately, too, the critics have been unanimously recommending to us —and that shows the genuine value to the community of mere book reviewers—the *Letters of Tchehov*, as noble a document as we have had for a very long time. But I thought they did not praise Tchehov enough as a critic, for that wise and lovable author, among his letters, made many casual asides about art that were pleasing and therefore right to me. I begin to fear that most of the good things said about literature are said in casual asides.

If I were asked to say why I preferred Christabel or Keats's odes to Tennyson's

Revenge or the *Barrack-Room Ballads*, I should find it hard to explain satisfactorily to anyone who preferred to read Tennyson or Kipling. Where are the criteria? Can a Chinaman talk to an Arab? The difference, we see at once, is even deeper than that of language. It is a difference in nature; and we may set up any criterion of literature we like, but it will never carry across such a chasm. Our only consolation is that we may tell the other man he is on the wrong side of it, but he will not care, because he will not see it. The means by which we are able to separate what is precious in books from the matrix is not a process, and is nothing measurable. It is instinctive, and not only differs from age to age, but changes in the life of each of us. It is as indefinable as beauty itself. An artist may know how to create a beautiful thing, but he cannot communicate his knowledge except by that creation. That is all he can tell us of beauty, and, indeed, he may be innocent of the measure of his effort; and the next generation may ridicule the very thing which gave us so much pleasure, pleasure we proved to our

own satisfaction to be legitimate and well-founded by many sound generalizations about art. The canons of criticism are no more than the apology for our personal preferences, no matter how gravely we back them. Sometimes it has happened that a book or a poem has succeeded in winning the approval of many generations, and so we may call it a classic. But what is the virtue of a classic, or of the deliberate and stately billows going with the wind when the world has scope and is fair, or of a child with a flower, or of the faint smile on the face of the dead boy in the muck when the guns were filling us with fear and horror of mankind? I don't know; but something in us appears to save us from the punishing comet of Zeus.

THE SOUTH DOWNS

May 22, 1920. The southern face of the hill fell, an abrupt promontory, to the woods of the plain. Its face was scored by the weather, and the dry drainage channels were headlong cascades of grey pebbles. Clumps of heather, sparse oak scrub with young leaves of bronze, contorted birch, and this year's croziers of the bracken (heaven knows their secret for getting lush aromatic sap out of such stony poverty), all made a tough life which held up the hill, steep as it was; though the hill was going, for the roots of some of the oaks were exposed, empty coils of rope from which the burden had slipped. In that sea of trees whose billows came to the foot of our headland, and out of sight beneath its waves, children were walking, gathering bluebells. We knew they were there, for we could hear their voices. But there was no other sign of our form of life except a neolithic flint scraper one of us had

picked up on the hill-top. The marks of the man who made it were as clear as the voices below. It had been lost since yesterday, it might be—anyhow, about the day the first Pyramid was finished. It depends on how one looks at the almanac. For you could feel the sun fire was young. It had not been long kindled. Its heat in the herbage was moist. One of the youngsters with me, bruising the bracken and snuffing it, said it smelt of almond and cucumber. Another said the crushed birch leaves smelt of sour apples. We could not say what the oak leaves smelt like. Then another grabbed a handful of leafmould, damp and brown and full of fibre. What did that smell of? They were not sure that they liked it. Perhaps it was the smell of the hill. They admitted that it wasn't a bad smell. They seemed a little afraid of that odour.

But I was trying to read, and neolithic times and the bluebell gatherers had run together. They were in the same day. My book had made of that May morning in Surrey an apparition without time and place. We hear ourselves laughing now, intent, for

instance, on confirming the almond and cucumber in bruised bracken, or catch the sound of our serious voices raised in a dispute over literature or politics. But these things are not really in our minds. We would not betray our secret thoughts to bluebell gatherers and boys snuffing the bracken. This book I was reading, and a fancied resemblance in that hill and its prospect, moved the shadows again—they are so readily moved—and I saw two of us in France on such a hill, gazing intently and innocently over just such a prospect, in the summer of 1915, without in the least guessing what, in that landscape before us, was latent for us both. Those downs across the way would be Beaumont Hamel and Thiepval. Bluebells! The publishers may send out what advice they choose to authors concerning the unpopularity of books about the War—always excepting, of course, the important reminiscences, the soft and heavy masses of words of the great leaders of the nations in the War which merely reveal that they never knew what they were doing. Certainly we could spare

that kind of war book, though it continues to arrive in abundance; a volume by a famous soldier explaining why affairs went strangely wrong is about the last place where we should look for anything but folly solemnly pondering unrealities. But whatever the publishers may say, we do want books about the War by men who were in it. Some of us have learned by now that France is a memory of such a nature that, though it is not often we dare stop to look directly at it, for the day's work must be done, yet it looms through the importance of each of these latter days as though the event of our lives were past, and we were at present merely watching the clock. The shadow of what once was in France is an abiding presence for us. We know nothing can happen again which will release us from it. And yet how much has been written of it? That is the measure of its vastness and its mystery—it possesses the minds of many men, but they are silent on what they know. They rarely speak of it, except to one of the fraternity. But where are their thoughts? Wandering, viewless and uneasy wraiths,

over Flanders, in Artois and Picardy. Those thoughts will never come home again to stay.

It is strange to me that publishers should suppose that books, intimate about the invisible but abiding shadow which is often more potent than present May sunshine, should not be wanted. Take for example this book I was reading, *The Squadroon*, by Ardern Beaman. To induce readers to buy it it has a picture on its dust-cover which kept me from reading it for weeks. This wrapper shows a ghostly knight in armour leading a charge of British cavalry in this War. I should have thought we had had enough of that romantic nonsense during the actual events. The War was "written up" for the benefit of readers who made a luxury of the sigh, and who were told and no doubt preferred to believe that the young soldier went into battle with the look we so admire in the picture called The Soul's Awakening. He was going to glory. There are no dead. There are only memorial crosses for heroes and the Last Post. The opinions of most civilians on the War were

as agreeable as stained-glass windows. The thought of a tangle of a boy's inside festooned on rusty wire would naturally have spoiled the soul's awakening and the luxury of the sigh. I heard of a civilian official, on his way to Paris after the Armistice, who was just saved by rapid explanations from the drastic attention of a crowd of Tommies who mistook him for a War Correspondent.

But Mr. Beaman's book is not like war correspondence. It can be commended to those who were not there, but who wish to hear a true word or two. Mr. Beaman as a good-natured man remembers how squeamish we are, and, being also shy and dainty, indicates some matters but briefly. I wish, for one thing, that when describing the doings of his cavalry squadron after the disaster on the Fifth Army front—the author enables you to feel how slender was the line of resolute men which then saved the Army from downfall—he had ventured to record with more courage the things which it shamed him to see. Why should only such as he know of those shocks to affability? But all he says about some

unpleasant matters is: "During those days we saw things of which it is not good to speak—of which afterwards we never did speak, except late at nights, in the privacy of our own mess."

Mr. Beaman's simple narrative, however, with its humanity and easy humour, often lets in light on strange affairs, as though he had forgotten what had been locked up, and had carelessly opened a forbidden door. He shuts it again at once, like a gentleman, and we follow him round hoping that presently he will do the same again. Ambrose Bierce could have made something of what is suggested in such a passage as this:

"On the borders of this horrid desolation (the Somme) we met a Salvage Company at work. That warren of trenches and dugouts extended for untold miles. . . . They warned us, if we insisted on going further in, not to let any man go singly, but only in strong parties, as the Golgotha was peopled with wild men, British, French, Australian, German deserters, who lived there underground, like ghouls among the mouldering dead, and who came out at nights to plunder and kill. In the night, an officer said, mingled

with the snarling of carrion dogs they often heard inhuman cries and rifle-shots coming from that awful wilderness. Once they (the Salvage Company) had put out, as a trap, a basket containing food, tobacco, and a bottle of whisky. But the following morning they found the bait untouched, and a note in the basket, 'Nothing doing!'"

KIPLING

June 5, 1920. One day, when I did not know Kipling's name, I found in a cabin of a ship from Rangoon two paper-covered books, with a Calcutta imprint, smelling of something, whatever it was, that did not exist in England. The books were *Plain Tales from the Hills* and *Soldiers Three.* It was high summer, and in that cabin of a ship in the Albert Dock, with its mixed odour of tea, teak, and cheroots, I read through all. The force in those stories went nearer to capturing me completely than anything I have read since. I can believe now that I just escaped taking a path which would have given me a world totally different from the one I know, and the narrowness of the escape makes me feel tolerant towards the young people who give up typewriting and book-keeping, and go out into an unfriendly world determined to be Mary Pickfords and Charlie Chaplins. A boy boards

a ship merely to get a parrot, and his friend, who brought it from Burma, has gone to Leadenhall Street ; there is a long interval, with those books lying in a bunk. Such a trivial incident—something like it happening every week to everybody—and to-day that boy, but for the grace of God, might be reading the leaders of the *Morning Post* as the sole relief to a congested mind, going every week to the cartoon of *Punch* as to barley water for chronic prickly heat, and talking of dealing with the heterodox as the Holy Office used to deal with unbaptized Indian babies for the good of their little souls.

I have recovered from those astonishing adventures with Kipling. I may read him to-day with enjoyment, but safe from excitation. This is due, perhaps, to a stringy constitution, subject to bilious doubts, which loves to see lusty Youth cock its hat when most nervous, swagger with merry insolence to hide the uncertainty which comes of self-conscious inexperience, assume a cynical shrewdness to protect its credulity, and imitate the abandon of the hard fellow who

has been to Hong Kong, Tal Tal, and Delagoa Bay. We enjoy seeing Youth act thus; but one learns in time that a visit to Rhodesia, worse luck, makes one no more intelligent than a week-end at Brighton. Well, it doesn't matter. What ingrates we should be now to turn on Kipling because we disagree with the politics he prefers, those loud opinions of his which, when we get too much of them, remain in the ears for a while like the echoes of a brass tray which a hearty child banged for a drum. Though we hold the British Constitution as sacred as the family vault we do not think the less of Dickens because the awful spectacle of our assembled legislators made him laugh, nor do we leave the room when Beethoven is played because his careless regard for a monarch's divine right is painful to us. If Kipling had not given us *My Sunday at Home* and the *Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney*, how should we have got them?

I have just read Kipling's book, *Letters of Travel*. Its attractive title drew me to it, and is to blame. Kipling has an uncanny

gift of sight. It prompts no divination in him, but its curiosity misses nothing that is superficial. If he had watched the Crucifixion, and had been its sole recorder, we should have had a perfect representation of the soldiers, the crowds, the weather, the smells, the colours, and the three uplifted figures ; so lively a record that it would be immortal for the fidelity and commonness of its physical experience. But we should never have known more about the central figure than that He was a cool and courageous rebel. Kipling can make a picture of an indifferent huddle of fishing boats in a stagnant harbour which is more enjoyable than being there. Letters from such a traveller would attract one directly across the bookshop. But these letters of his were addressed to his friends the Imperialists before the War, and one may guess the rest. Such an exposure moves one to sorrow over a writer whose omniscience used to make the timorous believe that arrogance, if lively enough, had some advantage over reason.

Yet there is in a few of the letters enough to show what we missed because they were

not addressed to himself, or to anybody but a Composite Portrait of The Breed. There are passages in the chapter called "Half a Dozen Pictures" which clear all irritation from the mind (for many of the author's insults are studied and gratuitous) and leave nothing but respect for the artist. These come when the artist sees only a riot of Oriental deck passengers, bears, and macaws, in the tropics; or a steamer coming round, exposed by a clarity like crystal in the trough of immense seas somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Auckland Islands at dayfall. We get such impressions when Kipling has, for the moment, forgotten the need to make a genuflection towards the Absolute and Everlasting Chutney, and is a man and brother delighting in his craft.

The rest of the book has, one must admit, a value, but it is an undesigned value; indeed, its value is that it was designed to prove, at the time it was written, something quite different. From this book, with its recurring contempt for England, you may see what value we need have attached to much that the assured and the violent

ever had to tell us about our Empire. If this publication is, indeed, an act of contrition for words unwisely written, then it should be read as a warning by all who write. Materialists naturally attach to transient circumstances a value which the less patriotic of us might think not really material. "We discussed, first of all, under the lee of a wet deck-house in mid-Atlantic; man after man cutting in and out of the talk as he sucked at his damp tobacco." There is no doubt Kipling supposes that the wet deck-house adds a value to the words spoken under its leeside. Yet the words he reports are what one may hear, with grief, any day in any tavern in the hurry and excitement of ten minutes before closing time. But Kipling always thought an opinion gained in value if expressed elsewhere than in England. His ideal government would be a polo-player from Simla leading the crew of the *Bolivar*.

Every horror in the world, the author of these letters tells us, has its fitting ritual. How easily, too, one realizes it, when feeling again the fanatic heat and force of this

maker of old magic with the tom-tom ; the vicious mockery, certain of popular applause, of ideas that are not marketable ; the abrupt rancour whenever the common folk must be mentioned ; the spite felt for England—" in England . . . you see where the rot starts " ; the sly suspicion of other countries, and the consequent jealousy and fear ; here it all is, convulsive, uncertain, inflammable. The prophet of Empire ! But the prophecy was wrong. England, " where the rot starts," bore most of the heat and burden of the day, and saved the Empire for the money-mongers. And what of the British youngsters who did that, who were not materialists in the least, but many of them the idealists for whom no abuse once could be too vicious ? The corruption of the Somme ! That faceless and nameless horror was the apotheosis of the Imperialist.

A DEVON ESTUARY

September 11, 1920. "This dreary expanse," the guide-book explains, "will not attract the tourist." The guide was right. I was alone to that degree beyond mere solitude when you feel you are not alone, but that the place itself is observing you. Yet only five miles away long lines of motor-cars were waiting to take tourists, at ruinous prices, to the authentic and admitted beauty spots. There was not, as the polite convention would put it, a soul about. It was certainly a dreary expanse, but the sunlight there seemed strangely brilliant, I thought, and, what was more curious, appeared to be alive. It was quivering. The transient glittering of some seagulls remote in the blue was as if you could glimpse, now and then, fleeting hints of what is immaculate in heaven. Nothing of our business was in sight anywhere except the white stalk of a lighthouse, and that, I knew, was miles away

across the estuary whose waters were then invisible, for it was not only low tide, but I was descending to the saltings, having left the turf of the upper salt marshes.

You felt that here in the saltings you were beyond human associations. The very vegetation was unfamiliar. The thrift, sea lavender, rocket, sea campion, and maritime spurge did not descend so low as this. They came no nearer than where the highest tidal marks left lines of driftwood and bleached shells, just below the break of the upper marshes. Here it was another kingdom, neither sea nor land, but each alternately during the spring tides. At first the sandy mud was reticulated with sun-cracks, not being daily touched by the sea, and the crevasses gave a refuge for algæ. There was a smell, neither pleasant nor unpleasant, which reminded you of something so deep in the memory that you could not give it a name. But it was sound and good. Beyond that dry flat the smooth mud glistened as if earth were growing a new skin, which yet was very tender. It was spongy, but it did not break when I trod on it, though the earth com-

plained as I went. It was thinly sprinkled with a plant like little fingers of green glass, the maritime samphire, and in the distance this samphire gave the marsh a sheen of continuous and vivid emerald.

The saltings looked level and unbroken. But on walking seaward I was continually surprised by drainage channels. These channels serpentined everywhere, and were deep and wide. Sometimes they contained nothing but silt, and sometimes they were salt-water rivers. I came upon each canyon unexpectedly. The first warning was a sudden eruption from it, a flock of dunlin, a flock which then passed seawards in a regimented flight that was an alternate flash of light and a swift shadow. Dunlin, curlew, oyster-catchers, or gulls, left a gulley just before I knew I was headed off again. In one of these creeks, however, the birds left me more than their delicate footprints to examine. They left there a small craft whose mast I had long taken to be a stump projecting from the mud. A young man in a brown beard, a brown shirt, and a pair of khaki trousers was sitting on its skylight. He

hailed, and showed me how I could get to him without sinking up to more than the knees in this dreary spot.

"Stay here if you like," he said, when I was with him. "When the tide is full I'll pull you round to the village." It was a little cutter of about fifteen tons, moored to the last huge links of a cable, the rest of which had long been covered up. I thought he was making holiday in a novel way. "No," he replied, "I'm living here."

It seems (I am but paraphrasing his apology) that he returned from Cambrai, bringing back from France, as a young officer, some wounds and other decorations, but also his youthful credulity and a remembrance of society's noble promises to its young saviours. But not long after his return to us the sight of us made him feel disappointed. He "stuck it," he said, as long as he could. But the more he observed us the worse he felt. That was why he gave up a good position a second time on our account. "What was the good of the money? The profiteers took most of it. I worked hard, and had to give up what I earned to every

kind of parasite. London was more disagreeable than ever was Flanders. Yet I think I would not object to sweep the roads for a community of good people. Yes, I thought nothing could be worse than the dead in the mud. But I found something worse. The minds of the living who did not know what I knew in France were worse to me. I couldn't remember the friends I'd lost and remain where I was with such folk about me. It was more awful than that German—did you ever meet him ?—who lay just the other side of the parapet for weeks and weeks."

His only companion now is a paraffin stove, which does not, perhaps, require a gas-mask to aid in its companionship, though about that I won't be sure. The only conversation he hears is that of the curlews ; subdued, cheerful, and very intimate voices, having just that touch of melancholy which intimacy, when it is secure and genuine, is sure to give, however jolly the intimacy may be. He said that at first he was afraid he could not live on what little money he had, and must earn casually, after buying the

boat, but " it's easier to live than I thought. There's not nearly as much worry needed as I used to suppose. It is surprising how much one can do without. I was rather scared at first when I got rid of my sense of duty. But, after all, it is not so hard to be free. Perhaps the world already has more soft and easy people than is good for it. I find one benefit of this life is that, being free of the crowd, I feel indifferent about the way the crowd chooses to go. I don't care now what the public does—that's its own affair, and I hope it will enjoy it." After a silence he said : " That sounds selfish, I know. And I'm not sure yet that it isn't. Anyhow, if one could help one's fellows one would. But is it possible to help them ? When did they last listen to reason ? The only guides they will listen to are frauds obvious enough to make an ass lay back his ears. Well, I think I'll wait here till the crowd knows enough to stop before it gets to the edge of the steep place—if it can stop now."

I asked him what he read. " Very little. I fish more than I read. You'd think it

would take only a week to learn all there is here. I should have thought so once. I see now that I shall never thoroughly know this estuary. It's a wonderful place. Every tide is a new experience. I am beginning to feel right again." In the boat, going round to the village, he learned I was a writer, rested on his oars, and drifted with the tide. "I'll give you a job," he said. "Write a book that will make people hate the idea that the State is God as Moloch was at last hated. Turn the young against it. The latest priest is the politician. No ritual in any religion was worse than this new worship of the State. If men don't wake up to that, then they are doomed." He began then to pull me towards humanity again.

BARBELLION

December 18, 1920. When posterity feels curious to discover what may have caused the disaster to our community it will get a little light from the merry confessions of our contemporary great folk. Let it read Colonel Repington's *Diary*, Mrs. Asquith's book, and the memoirs of General French. The general, of course, implies that he was so puzzled by the neutrality of time and space, and by the fact that the treacherous enemy was in trenches and used big guns. Our descendants may learn from these innocent revelations what quality of knowledge and temper, to be found only in a superior caste, guided the poor and lowly, and shaped our fate for us. They will know why wars and famines were inevitable for us, and why nothing could avert doom from the youth of our Europe. There is no disputing the importance of these confessions. But their relationship to literature? For

that matter they might be linoleum. Yet there has been a book of confessions published recently which may be read as literature when the important gossip with the vast sales is merely curious evidence for historians equipped for psychological analysis. I mean Barbellion's *Journal of a Disappointed Man.*

It will interest our descendants to learn that outside the circle which Colonel Repington reports, at its dinner-tables where the ladies were so diverting, the fare usually excellent, and the gentlemen discussed the " combing out " of mere men for places like Ypres, there was genuine knowledge and warm understanding. Beyond those cheerful dinner-tables, and in that outer darkness of which the best people knew nothing except that it was possible to rake it fruitfully with a comb, there was a host of young men from which could be manifested the courageous intellectual curiosity, the ardour for truth, the gusto for life, and the love of earth, which we see in Keeling's letters and Barbellion's diary. All is shown in these two books in an exceptional degree, and in Barbellion's diary is expressed with a remark-

able wit and acuteness, and not seldom, as in the description of a quarry, of a Beethoven Symphony, of a rock-pool of the Devon coast, with a beauty that is startling.

Keeling was killed in the War. Barbellion (who, as we know now, was Bruce Cummings) never went to France, for he was dying, though he did not know it, when he presented himself for medical examination. But it is clear that though secluded from the turmoil in a country cottage, paralysed, and his trunk already dead, Barbellion's sensitive mind and imaginative sympathy knew more of what was happening to his fellows in France, and what it meant for us all, than the combined Cabinet in Downing Street. That spark of dying light was aware when the luminaries on whom we depended were blind and ignorant. In his *Last Diary*, and within a day or two of his death, he wrote of the Peace Treaty (May, 1919): "After all the bright hopes of last autumn, justice will be done only when all the power is vested in the people. Every liberal-minded man must feel the shame of it." But did such men feel the shame of

it ? Refer to what the popular writers, often liberal-minded, said about the shame they felt at the time, and compare. To Barbellion, by the light of his expiring lamp, was revealed what was hidden from nearly all experienced and active publicists. Is there any doubt still of the superiority of imagination over hard-headedness ?

Imagination instantly responds. Percolation is a slow process in the hard head of the worldly-wise. When we know that in the elderly, the shrewd, and the practical, the desire for material power and safety, qualified only by fear, served as their substitute for the City of God during the War, it is heartening to remember that there were select though unknown young men, mere subjects for "combing" like Barbellion, who made articulate an immense rebellious protest that was in the best of our boys ; who showed a mocking intuition into us and our motives, as though we were a species apart ; a scorn of the world we had made for them, a cruel knowledge of the cowardice and meanness at the back of our warlike minds, and a yearning for that

world of beauty which might have been, but which the acts of the clever and the practical have turned into carrion among the ruins. Would it matter now if we were bankrupt, and our Empire among the things that were, if only we were turning to sackcloth and ashes because of that dousing of the glim in the heart of the young?

This last diary of Bruce Cummings is sad enough, for he could but lie inert, listen to the last news of the War, and wonder incidentally who would come to him first—the postman bringing the reviews of his first book, or the bony old gentleman bringing the scythe. He felt, of course, the mockery of this frustration of his powers. He thought —and, it seemed, with good reason—that he was a tragic failure. But was he? Read his books, and admit that he accomplished a little that is beautiful and enduring, and that he did it obscurely at a time when they who held most of the fearful attention of the world were but working gravely on what their children would execrate.

Some critics find in the diary of Barbellion's last days evidence that he remem-

bered he was writing for an audience. It may be there, but it is not plain to me. It is likely that if we were writing a paragraph while doubtful whether the hair which held the sword over us would last till we had finished, we might find we were not so joyously abandoned to pure art as we used to be. The interest of the book is that it is some more of Bruce Cummings when we could not have expected another line from him. Apart even from their literary value, it seems to me that some day his three volumes may prove to bear historic witness as important as that of Colonel Repington's diary. It was just such minds as Barbellion's, not uncommon in the youth of our war time—though in his case the unusual intuitions and adventurous aspirations were defined by genius—it was such minds that the war-mongers condemned and destroyed. Those men were selected for sacrifice because they had the very qualities which, when lost to the community, then it dies in its soul. They were candid with themselves, and questioned our warranty with the same candour, but were

modest and reticent; they were kindly to us when they knew we were wooden and wrong, and did our bidding, judging it was evil. In France they subdued their insurgent thoughts—and what that sacrifice meant to them in the lonely night watches I have been privileged to learn—and surrendered, often in terrible derision, to our will; and then in cool and calculated audacity devised the very tasks in which the bravest and most intelligent would be the first to die.

BREAKING THE SPELL

April 8, 1921. My seat by the Serpentine was under a small and almost impalpable cloud of almond petals. The babbling of ducks somewhere in the place where the water seemed a pale and wavering fire was like the sound of the upwelling of the hidden spring of life. This was the spot where I could sit and there quietly match the darker shades of trouble in the afternoon papers, the time being April in England, and the sky ineffable. There was not a trace of mourning in the sky; not a black-edged cloud. But human life, being an urgent and serious affair, and not a bright blue emptiness like Heaven; human life being a state of trial in which, as favoured beings, we are "heated hot with burning fears and dipped in baths of hissing tears" for our own good, could not be expected to look as pleasant, during so severe a necessary process, as almond trees in blossom. So I

sat down and prepared to measure, from the news in the papers, the depth of the present border on our daily memorial card.

The black border was rather a deep one, when measured. The fears were fairly hot. There were no noticeable signs of any tears in the papers, so far, but one could guess there would be a deep extinguishing bath of them ready to hiss presently, if all went well, and our affairs had uninterrupted development under the usual clever guides. And we had the guides. I could see that. The papers were loud with the inspirations of friends of ours who had not missed a single lesson of the War for those who were not in it; who were still resolute in that last and indispensable ditch which no foe is ever likely to reach. But by now the almond's cloud had vanished. I no longer heard the bubbling of the well of life.

I finished reading the papers. Now I knew our current fate, and felt as if I heard again the gas gong going continuously. I had the feeling in April, unknown to any snail on the thorn, that the park was deafening with the clangour of pallid, tense, and

contending lunatics. The Serpentine had receded from this tumult. Its tranquil shimmering was now fatuous and unbelievable. It was but half seen; its glittering was a distant grimacing and mockery at my troubled human intelligence. It was nothing to do with me, and showed it in that impertinent way. Two ducks, two absurd ducks, suddenly appeared before me on the polished water. They were bowing politely to each other—only I was looking at them—and were making soothing noises in imbecile ignorance of the fate overhanging us all. There was a boy not far away. He stood as still as a thought entranced. He was watching a boat with a paper sail. He was as intent as if he were God observing the progress of Columbus, knowing now that America is about to be found.

If that boy had but guessed what I knew! But he had not read the latest news. It is the privilege of knowledge to be superior and grave; to be able to smile sadly at the dream of a Golden Galleon which childhood sees in April by the Serpentine; for knowledge is aware of the truth, the tumult

surrounding us of contentious lunatics, endless, inexplicable ; the noise of mankind in its upward journey towards the eclipse, or some other heavenly mystery.

Presently that tinted mist which was a tree in flower began to shine again through the dark noise which the papers had made. The uproar cleared a little. The water came nearer, its glittering growing stronger, its fire burning towards me. I saw in surprise through the gloom in my mind that the fire had touched the elms ; their dark masses were faintly luminous. And the mallard drake, riding on the outer pulses of that radiation, was purple and emerald. But would the beauty of the spring surprise us, I wonder ; would it still give the mind a twinge, sadden us with a nameless disquiet, shoot through us so keen an anguish when the almond tree is there again on a bright day, if we were decent, healthy, and happy creatures ? Perhaps not. It is hard to say. It is a great while since our skinless and touchy crowds of the wonderful industrial era, moving as one man to the words of the daily papers, were such creatures. Per-

haps we should merely yawn and stretch ourselves, feel revived with the sun a little warmer on our barks, and snuff up a pleasant smell which we remembered; begin to whistle, and grope for an adze.

But we cannot have it so. The spring is not for us. We have been so inventive. We have desired other things, and we have got them. We have cleverly made a way of life that exacts so close an attention, if we would save it from disaster, that we are now its prisoners. Peace and freedom have become but a vision which the imprisoned view through the bars they themselves have made. The spring we see now is in a world not ours, a world we have left, which is still close to us, but is unapproachable. The children are in it, and even, apparently, the ducks. It is a world we see sometimes, as a reminder—once a year or so—of what we could have made of life, and what we have.

Which is the real world? I worried over that as I was leaving the park. I seemed to be getting nearer to reality near Rotten Row. A reassuring policeman was in sight. Motor-cars that were humiliating

with their enamel and crystal were threading about. The fashionable ladies and their consorts seemed to be in no doubt about the world they were in. I began to feel mean and actual. While thus composing my mind I chanced to look backwards. A miniature glade was there, where the tree trunks were the columns in an aisle. Was it a sward between them? I doubt whether we could walk it. I call it green. I know of no other word. Perhaps the sun was playing tricks with it. It may not have been there. As I kept my eye on it, disbelieving that light—desirous to believe it, but unable to, faith being weak—a rabbit moved into the aisle. I call it a rabbit, for I know no other word. But I declare now that I do not accept that creature. It sat up, and watched me. I don't say it was there. As far as I know, any rabbit would have been terrified with all those people about. But not this apparition, its back to the sunset, with an aura and radiant whiskers of gold. It regarded me steadfastly. I looked around to see if I were alone in this.

The policeman was unconscious of it.

The lady who sat on the chair opposite, the lady with the noticeable yellow legs, was talking in animation, but I doubt it was about this rabbit. The saunterers were passing without a sign. But one little girl stood, her hands behind her, oblivious of all but that admonitory creature in an unearthly light, and was smiling at it. It was the only confirmation I had. I have no recollection now of what I saw in the day's paper. I have later and better news.

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